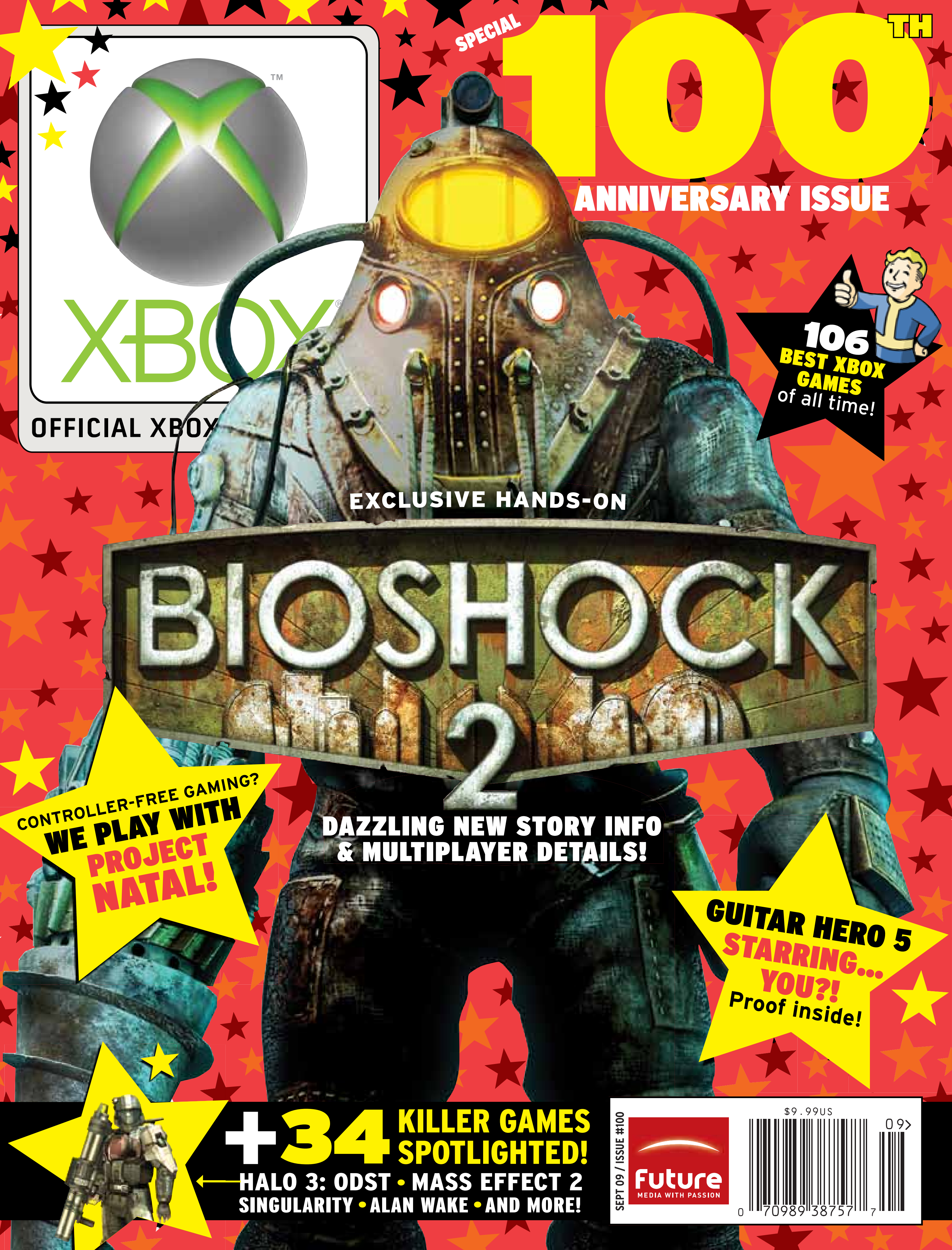

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100TH
ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
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EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON
BIOSHOCK 2
DAZZLING NEW STORY INFO & MULTIPLAYER DETAILS!
CONTROLLER-FREE GAMING? WE PLAY WITH PROJECT NATAL!
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XBOX CONTENTS

SEPTEMBER 2009
ISSUE #100

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GIVE US THE 411: What issue of *OXM* is your favorite? Is it one from the original-Xbox era, or a more recent one? And why? Spill your guts at *letters@officialxboxmagazine.com*.



DISC

PLAY, WATCH, AND EXPLORE WITH THE OXM DISC!

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XBOX 360 DEMOS

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 4
Developer: EA Canada   Publisher: EA   ESRB: T
Mash faces in this gorgeous boxing title!

NCAA FOOTBALL 10
Developer: EA Tiburon   Publisher: EA   ESRB: E
Toss around the ol' pigskin once more!

RED FACTION: GUERRILLA
Developer: Volition   Publisher: THQ   ESRB: M
RFG's second demo is a multiplayer smash!

SBK 09
Developer: Black Bean Games   Publisher: Milestone   ESRB: RP
This European racer is serious business!

SUPERSTARS V8 RACING
Dev: Black Bean Games   Pub: Codemasters   ESRB: RP
Take on racing's toughest courses!

X-BLADES
Developer: Gaijin Ent.   Publisher: Southpeak   ESRB: M
Mmmm...dual gunblades and Russian anime!

LIVE ARCADE DEMOS

ALTERED BEAST
Developer: Backbone Ent.   Publisher: Sega   ESRB: E10+
Werewolves! Demons! Vintage coin-op! Whoa!

BLAZING BIRDS
Developer: Vector 2 Games   Publisher: Microsoft   ESRB: E
Fast robot badminton = awesome surprise!

COMIX ZONE
Developer: Backbone Ent.   Publisher: Sega   ESRB: E
No need for time travel! Get it now!

GUNSTAR HEROES
Dev: Backbone Ent.   Pub: Sega   ESRB: E10+
See why this classic shooter is so beloved!

PHANTASY STAR II
Dev: Backbone Ent.   Pub: Sega   ESRB: E
Try the granddaddy of all great JRPGs!

SHINOBI
Dev: Backbone Ent.   Pub: Sega   ESRB: E10+
Ninja it up in this gaming staple!

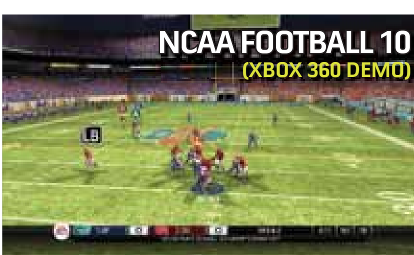
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 3
Dev: Backbone Ent.   Pub: Sega   ESRB: E
The final entry in the epic trilogy!

TEXAS CHEAT 'EM
Dev: Wideload Games   Pub: D3   ESRB: T
Cheat your way to the top!

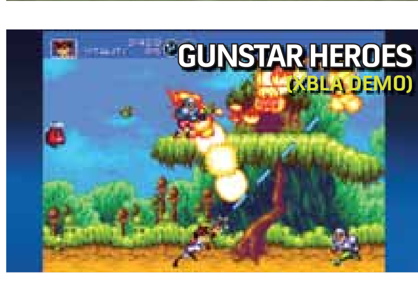
WALLACE & GROMIT'S GRAND ADVENTURES, EPISODE 1
Dev: Telltale Games   Pub: Telltale Games   ESRB: E
Claymation's darling duo returns!











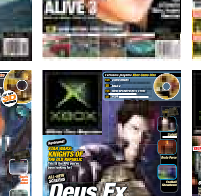
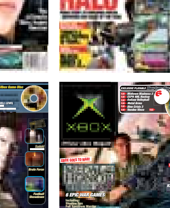
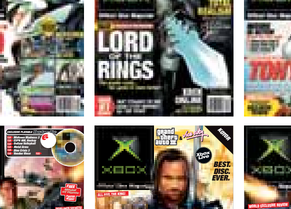


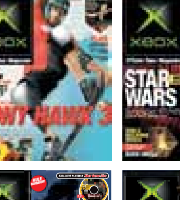
BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

- Whiplash-inducing videos of **Batman: Arkham Asylum**, **Mini Ninjas**, and **Battlefield: Bad Company 2**!
- Eye-sizzling artwork from **Modern Warfare 2**, **The Beatles: Rock Band**, and **Splinter Cell Conviction**!

RITE OF BASH-AGE: In his first week at *OXM*, Corey gamely challenged Ryan to a bout of *Fight Night Round 3* — and was clobbered. Painfully. He's practicing hard for their *FNR4* rematch!

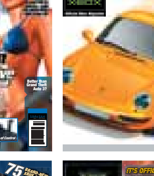




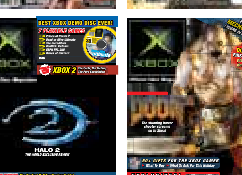










FROM COVER TO COVER

A look back at all 100 *OXM* covers, including our favorite from each Xbox era!





Wow, *Tao Feng*. Anyone remember this one? It was *Mortal Kombat* ko-kreator John Tobias' first (and so far only) attempt at post-*Kombat* success.

This *Halo 2* cover story was written by then-executive editor Frank O'Connor. Bungie liked it so much that it eventually led to him getting hired there.

Part of the impact of this image came from the fact that it revealed a huge game feature: dual-wielding!

This was all that needed to be said. This issue had the first real information on the most anticipated sequel ever, and it hit when anticipation was running at a fever pitch. Not surprisingly, it was also one of our best-sellers.

Believe it or not, Microsoft used to mandate that we not obscure any part of their logo. Thankfully, that's changed.

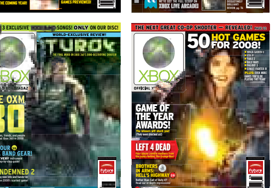
This cover initially met with mixed reactions at both *OXM* and BioWare. Since then, it's become one of our favorites. Thematically, the design gives the cover an appropriately '70s sci-fi feel.

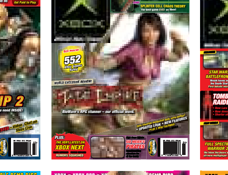
Mystery solved: Commander Shepard's not dead! Trust us — we're not exactly in the habit of putting dead game characters on our cover.

This was originally a hit for a *Fight Night Round 4* exclusive review; a last-minute bug with the software caused us to bump the review to the following issue.





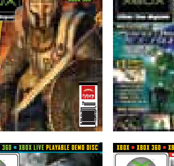
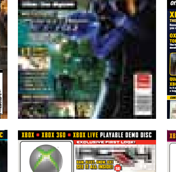



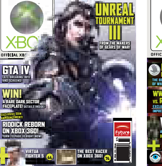
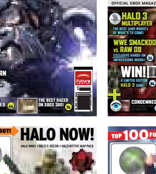


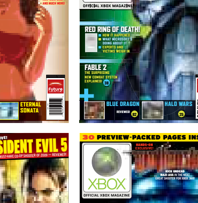


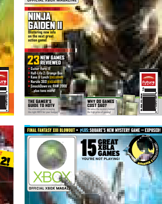


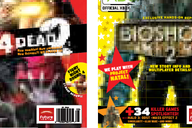


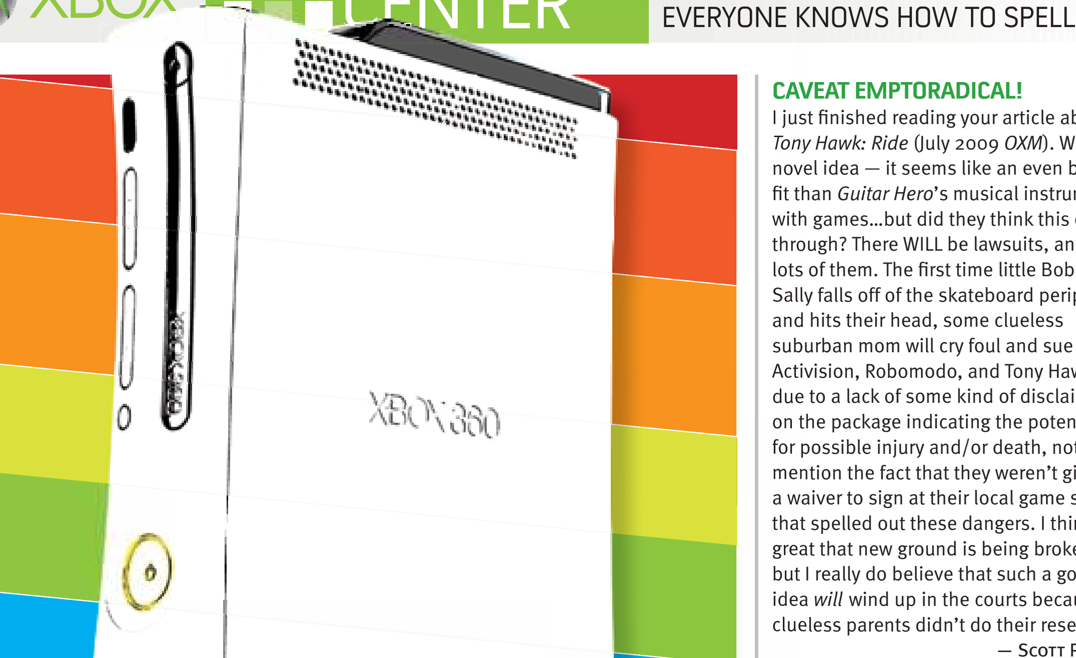




COVERS BY THE NUMBERS: *Halo* has dominated the cover 10 times. *Grand Theft Auto* is second with five cover appearances, and *Splinter Cell* has owned four *OXM* covers.

NOTICE ANYTHING?: If the 100th-issue cover here looks different than the one on the front of this magazine, it's because we tweak the cover up until the very last second.



360 + NATAL = XBOX 540?

While watching Microsoft's E3 press conference, I caught one sentence that really bothered me. After Project Natal was shown, Don Mattrick said that Microsoft is ready for the next generation of gaming without having to update the hardware. This sounds to me like Microsoft is going to release Natal as their next-gen console. As much as I love the 360 and all of the innovations in gaming and entertainment, I would love to see Microsoft release a new console for the next generation, hopefully fixing the heat issues and fan noises from the 360.

— Ryan

We say: Mattrick's comment wasn't the only one that people took the wrong way; a few weeks later, Steve Ballmer also suggested new hardware was in the works, then retracted it. But the "like a new console" talk is actually supposed to make you feel better about the 360 you already own. Usually we see consoles last four or five years, but Microsoft says they want the 360 (and your investment in it) to last longer. Natal's 3D motion interface is a way to keep the gaming experience fresh without a mandatory hardware upgrade. Well, unless you count the fact that you'll need to buy Natal itself, and we don't know how much that will cost. Hmm. But as far as a new machine goes, think "brand-new bundle" when it comes out, not a "new" Xbox.

CAVEAT EMPTORADICAL!

I just finished reading your article about *Tony Hawk: Ride* (July 2009 *OXM*). What a novel idea — it seems like an even better fit than *Guitar Hero*'s musical instruments with games...but did they think this one through? There WILL be lawsuits, and lots of them. The first time little Bobby or Sally falls off of the skateboard peripheral and hits their head, some clueless suburban mom will cry foul and sue Activision, Robomodo, and Tony Hawk due to a lack of some kind of disclaimer on the package indicating the potential for possible injury and/or death, not to mention the fact that they weren't given a waiver to sign at their local game store that spelled out these dangers. I think it's great that new ground is being broken, but I really do believe that such a good idea *will* wind up in the courts because clueless parents didn't do their research.

— Scott Phares

We say: All Activision can do is include a warning on and inside the package — something they're going to do. We contacted them to be sure, and our rep at the company confirmed it: "All of our hardware peripheral products come with standard software and hardware warnings. They include on-package warnings as well, along with usage instructions." No one can regulate stupidity — that seems to blossom freely — but we really hope you're wrong... even if we're afraid you might be right.



Is this doomed to be Exhibit A?

DELTA WEAPONS IN BETA

Your Burning Questions feature got me thinking: Is it possible to have a chainsaw bayonet? And if so, would it be a practical thing to use on the battlefield?

— Anthony Scarola

KOXM play list

What's your favorite custom soundtrack for your favorite Xbox 360 game? Email your five-song playlist, the game it goes with, your Gamertag, and a digital pic of yourself to ***letters@officialxboxmagazine.com*** with the subject line "KOXM Play List."



Gamertag: **Ecto 88**

Game: ***Gears of War***

Playlist: **Snoogans**

1. **"Bite to Break Skin" — Senses Fail**
2. **"Right Round" — Flo Rida**
3. **"Blow" — Atreyu**
4. **"What's It Feel Like to Be a Ghost?" — Taking Back Sunday**
5. **"Matchbook" — Strung Out**



Thiel poses with his chainsaw-bayonet prototype. Zombies beware!

We say: We all feel a little safer telling you that a chainsaw bayonet does exist — and it's American. Aaron Thiel, an Army infantryman currently deployed to Baghdad, uploaded videos of his homemade weapon's test assaults on hapless pumpkins on YouTube (www.youtube.com/pfcthiel). He's mounted an 18-volt saw to both an AR-15 and an AK-47, and even to a semi-auto Saiga shotgun. Is it a practical thing to use on the battlefield? Not yet... but maybe soon. "I have a few ideas for a second-generation prototype," says Thiel. "It has more of a resemblance to the Lancer as well as more power and more 'aggressive' teeth. Stay tuned — you ain't seen nothing yet!"

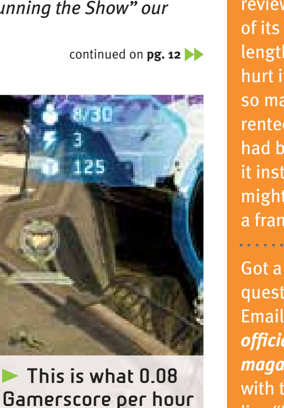
THE SHOW MUST GO ON (AND ON)

I am very surprised that your "10 Most Soul-Crushing Achievements" article (July 2009 *OXM*) didn't include "Running the Show" from *Halo Wars*. The achievement requires 2.4 million XP but is worth only 50 Gamerscore. To convey to you how hard this is, I have played 217 matchmade games of *Halo Wars* and have just 313,000 XP to show for it. The average game time is 21 minutes, 36 seconds, so that means I have spent 78 hours just to get one-eighth of the way there. I'm looking at 624 hours to rise to the rank of General, and I win a great deal of my games! Someone who is less skilled is likely to get FAR fewer points per game. I think that beats the hell out of most of the other stuff you have in that article!

— Warlord Alpha

We say: We wanted to keep the list to just 10, but that's a doozy worthy of crushing a soul or two. Consider "Running the Show" our official number 11.

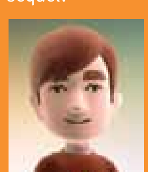
continued on pg. 12



This is what 0.08 Gamerscore per hour looks like.

HOT BUTTON

Reader L.J. writes: "I enjoyed *Gun* from Activision. What are the chances that we'll see a sequel?"

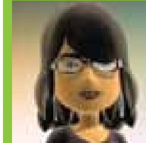


Dan responds: "Sadly, not good. Though *Gun* got generally good reviews and the Neversoft team put a lot of love into it, it simply didn't sell well enough to earn a full-fledged sequel. Apparently, the review criticisms of its short length really hurt its sales, so many people rented it. If they had bought it instead, we might have seen a franchise."

Got a Hot Button question? Email ***letters@officialxboxmagazine.com*** with the subject line "Hot Button."




EMAIL FORUM XBOX LIVE MAIL



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

LET'S TAKE A WALK DOWN MEMORY LANE

100™ ISSUE

A hundred issues, huh? I can barely believe it myself, and I've been lucky enough to be around for all of them. I remember being locked up in the office equivalent of a sweatshop way back in mid-2001 with a tiny handful of the original staff, four European guys responsible for launching their own respective *Official Xbox Magazine* (France, Germany, UK, and Italy), and a whole lotta nerves. This was Microsoft's first big, bold step into the home-videogame console arena, and no one knew what to expect except a name — "Xbox? What's an XBOX?" — and some game called *Halo*.

I remember when editors from other console magazines would stroll by our little cave and make goofy remarks about how clunky-big the Xbox was or how they could "smell Dreamcast" in the air. Now, 100 issues later and eight years after that launch, I can honestly say it's been a bonkers, *Halo*-fueled ride through riotous LAN parties; software shifts between West, East, and back again; stupid-big controllers; and more trendy techno-lingo slung than I care to count. (Hello, bump-mapping!) But one thing remains: Xbox.

I'm pretty amazed, honestly. This little system, in both original and 360 forms, has changed everything from how we view multiplayer gaming to what console devotees picture when they hear "RPG" to the elusiveness of third-party exclusives. It's a very different world compared to that wide-eyed first push forward eight years ago. We couldn't have imagined it when we put the first *OXM* to bed, and I'm excited to see what happens over the next 100.

Francesca

MISSION STATEMENT

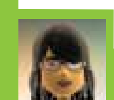
OXM is the most complete, entertaining, and dynamic information source for Xbox gamers. The magazine and disc are expressly created to enhance the passion for Xbox gaming shared by readers and editors alike. *OXM* publishes the best, most revealing stories; digs deepest for the most valuable insights; and is resolutely committed to providing Xbox gamers with the most reliable buying advice. We are *Official Xbox Magazine*, and we are *officially* dedicated to giving the Xbox community the best games magazine and disc that money can buy.

Meet the Team

THIS BEING ISSUE 100, WE'VE GOT THE PREREQUISITE AMOUNT OF INTROSPECTION BETWEEN THE COVERS. WE ALSO HAD A GREAT STAFF FIGHT ABOUT THE TOP 100 FEATURE! BUT THIS ISSUE IS A MILESTONE, NOT A FINISH LINE. OFF TO THE FUTURE WE GO, WITH THANKS FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT...

What's your favorite Xbox memory? Attending the 2001 Tokyo Game Show for the launch of original Xbox, only to be greeted by this...





Francesca Reyes
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

What's your favorite Xbox memory? I'll never forget the day a beta build of *Rock Band* showed up at the *OXM* office, months before the game's release. We tore open the box like editors possessed — hungrily eyeing the contents, practically slobbering as we assembled the drums. Everyone hurriedly told someone they'd be "working late," and then we rocked well into the night, gleefully unlocking pieces of the unannounced setlist. It was gaming bliss.



Corey Cohen
MANAGING EDITOR

What's your favorite Xbox memory? Man, this is almost embarrassingly clichéd, but it's when I stepped off the dropship for the first time in *Halo* and looked around. Everything was so awesomely pretty, and it was abundantly clear that I was about to dive into a magical, groundbreaking science-fiction game. It's also burned in my brain because I was working on the review right after 9/11 (at my old job), and it was an antidote to all that madness.



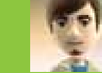
Paul Curthoys
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

What's your favorite Xbox memory? I lined up for 14 hours at my local Target to buy a 360 on launch day, braving chilling winds overnight. I was fourth in line with a Premium ticket, but someone else who had arrived that morning tricked the cashier and bought it unfairly. I ran after him and stopped him at his car; he tried to run me over, but security was on my side and they made him return it! I still have it (post–RROD repair, mind you), and I think I always will.



Dan Amrich
SENIOR EDITOR

What's your favorite Xbox memory? Never had my fanboy dreams been more fulfilled than when I got to travel to Bungie with former *OXM* EIC Rob Smith to play through *Halo 2* a full eight weeks before its release. We were the first people outside of Bungie or Microsoft to play it! Though the game's ending was, shall we say, shocking, it was amazing to spend three days at *Halo* HQ and be the first to experience the long-awaited sequel just as the hype was peaking.



Ryan McCaffrey
SENIOR EDITOR

What's your favorite Xbox memory? Back in the *OXM* day, with the original crew (see photo, page 89), we used to turn our back on our work promptly at 5 p.m. for some good ol'-fashioned *Halo* multiplayer. For me, there was nothing quite like shotgun-squatting inside my team's base or tank-camping on the hill over the teleporter while showering the other team's base with bullets and rockets. So naughty. Oh, how I loved playing CTF in Blood Gulch! Thanks for the memories!

Juliann Brown
ART DIRECTOR

What's your favorite Xbox memory? When the release date for the Xbox 360 was finally announced, I was ready. I promptly grabbed all of my old systems and games, ran down to my local EB, and traded them all in. On launch day, I demanded my preordered system from the cashier, and was presented with a bill for $8.56. Not a bad deal for a 17-year-old kid.

Taylor Cocke
SUPER INTERN

What's your favorite Xbox memory? The first time I played *Crackdown* with a friend overseas who I'd previously known only through messageboards. It was genuinely startling to talk directly for the first time, and to do so while throwing cars at each other. It really brought home to me how remarkable Xbox Live was.

John Hicks
EDITOR, OXM UK

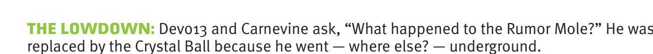
What's your favorite Xbox memory? So many good times, but the one that stands out for me was playing *Guitar Hero II* live on stage at Donington Park Rock Festival. I was totally wasted and could barely hit a note, much to the amusement (or disdain) of the 5,000 or so people watching. I don't want to know what was in those cans they were pelting me with.

Ben Talbot
COMMUNITY EDITOR, OXM UK

What's your favorite Xbox memory? A few years ago Microsoft rented a plush riverside penthouse to showcase its upcoming releases. There were two rooms, the right one packed with demos of all the biggest games of the time. The *OXM* team was directed left and sat down for an exclusive first hands-on with *Gears of War* by way of a four-on-four competitive deathmatch. We never made it into the other room.

Gillen McAllister
STAFF WRITER, OXM UK

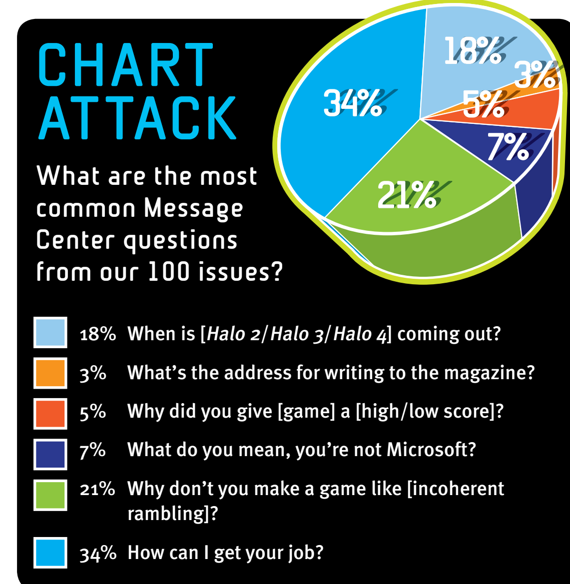
NOT GONNA HAPPEN: In response to May's "Choke!" article, AwesomeDude12 wants Infinity Ward to release a free alternate ending to *Call of Duty: World at War*. (Um...nope.)



THE LOWDOWN: Devo13 and Carnevine ask, "What happened to the Rumor Mole?" He was replaced by the Crystal Ball because he went — where else? — underground.

CHART ATTACK

What are the most common Message Center questions from our 100 issues?



- 18% When is [*Halo 2*/*Halo 3*/*Halo 4*] coming out?
- 3% What's the address for writing to the magazine?
- 5% Why did you give [game] a [high/low score]?
- 7% What do you mean, you're not Microsoft?
- 21% Why don't you make a game like [incoherent rambling]?
- 34% How can I get your job?



THE CUTTING HEDGE

I would like to bring up an important issue you need to address in your magazine. It's a problem that has been overlooked by you, the gaming industry, and gamers in general. What I refer to, of course, is the constant bashing of Zombies. You see, I am an Undead-American, and though I enjoy a good game of *Dead Rising* or *Left 4 Dead*, these games and others fail to depict the positive aspects of Zombies like myself. We sweep the floors at the malls, expedite your paperwork at the DMV, and even hold key positions in government. Just because we enjoy fresh brains (yum!) does not excuse our being chased around with gardening implements!

— Roy M.

We say: Roy, that was a well-considered and rational letter, and we're sensitive to your concerns about gardening implements. Consequently, when you come charging in a horde with several hundred of your Undead-American allies, intending to rip us to shreds and pop open our skulls like so many cans of Mountain Dew, we will use our sharpest chainsaw to decapitate you, rather than a hedge trimmer.

100 ISSUES: TOTAL RECALL

We asked our Xbox.com forum posters for their strongest OXM memories. How many match yours?

I have subscribed to *OXM* since I got my first Xbox. I got the original Xbox almost a week before launch. I preordered it online and the company I ordered it from shipped it out a week before launch; I had it up and running about four days before it was available in stores! All my friends were jealous, but it was all good because we had a big *Halo*-fest all week!

— Dan "Killalaz" Lazarus

My best memory would be when I first started listening to the KOXM Podcast three years ago. I read every single word in the magazine and listened to every podcast, sometimes more than once. And I was even inspired to write my own articles and make my own "magazine" with the help of Photoshop.

— Kamikaze8

OXM's review of *Halo 2*. This was the pinnacle and most significant review at the time. Could three years of hype finally be justified on November 9, 2004? *OXM* delivered that answer in 14 pages of bliss.

— GOON360

Two really stick out for me: The demise and return of the bottom-page quips, and seeing *Starcraft: Ghost* on the cover *twice*...and the freaking game never came out. I really was looking forward to that one. Just thinking about it again really pisses me off.

— HowlingCoyote

Watching the video podcast when the goofball hit the wrong button in *Rock Band*, ending the Endless Setlist one song short. *[Editor's note: That was Dan!]*

— TEEqAREdotCOM

The first time OXM Universe came on a disc. I couldn't wait for the next disc so I could build the spaceships and explore the places. And when there were free songs for *Rock Band*.

— SynysterKobra

I'd have to say that my best memories of *OXM* have always been on my toilet. It's one of the best reads around!

— CAWeissen

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EMAIL


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Gamertag: [EDITOR'S FIRST NAME] OXM
XBOX LIVE


4000 Shoreline Ct., Ste. 400, SSF, CA 94080
SNAIL MAIL



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BAD
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF **Francesca Reyes**
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OFF THE WALL
ART DIRECTOR **Juliann Brown**
CONTRIBUTING GRAPHIC DESIGNER **Christina Empedocles**
CONTRIBUTING iLLUSTRATOR **Nate van Dyke**

INVINCIBLE
PUBLISHER **Kelley Corten**
SENIOR DIR. NATIONAL ADVERTISING **Rachelle Considine**
650-238-2505, rconsidine@futureus.com
EXECUTIVE DIR. INTEGRATED SALES **Nate Hunt**
415-269-5408, nhunt@futureus.com
REGIONAL SALES DIRECTOR **Isaac Ugay**
949-305-0767, iugay@futureus.com
REGIONAL SALES MANAGER **Rachel Campos**
650-745-9207, rcampos@futureus.com
ACCOUNT MANAGER **Arthur St. Germain**
650-238-2571, astgermain@futureus.com
INTEGRATED SALES DIRECTOR **Joe Pomparelli**
323-342-1888, jpomparelli@futureus.com
INTEGRATED SALES MANGER **David Wells**
646-723-5493, dwells@futureus.com
DETROIT CONSUMER MANAGER **Alan Dickinson**
248-792-2408, alandmedia@comcast.net
ADVERTISING COORDINATOR **Heidi Hapin**
hhapin@futureus.com
SENIOR MARKETING MANAGER **Andrea Recio-Ang**
arecio-ang@futureus.com

DANGEROUS
PRODUCTION DIRECTOR **Richie Lesovoy**
PRODUCTION COORDINATOR **Lewis Lee**
PRINT ORDER COORDINATOR **Linh Chau-Ward**

THRILLER
DIR. CONSUMER MARKETING **Rich McCarthy**
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emma.parkinson@futurenet.co.uk

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FUTURE US, INC.
4000 Shoreline Court,
Suite 400, South San
Francisco, CA 94080
www.futureus.com




PRESIDENT **Jonathan Simpson-Bint**
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Halo 3: ODST



Shock, drop, and roll

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: MICROSOFT Developer: BUNGIE Multiplayer: YES
Release Date: SEPT. 22, 2009 For Fans Of: *Halo*, film noir, crushing Covenant forces with conviction



► Yeah, this isn't intense or anything... Welcome to Firefight mode — don't expect anything to come easy.

► A significantly enhanced *Halo 3* engine makes for pretty effects.

► This might be the last time you see your ODST teammates at peace.

Halo: Reach

As if you needed additional incentive to pick up *Halo 3: ODST*, all copies will come with a multiplayer beta invite for Bungie's just-announced mystery title, *Halo: Reach*. But what is *Reach*? Is it that long-rumored squad-based shooter we've heard online grumblings about since *Halo 3*? Is it some sort of interactive RPG version that tells the tale only previously spun in the *Halo* novels? No one knows for sure just yet, but we guarantee that the world will be watching when Bungie finally does lift the curtain on it.

"We could call it a prequel, but it really does take place just weeks before [the events in] *Halo 3*," comments Joseph Staten, the lead writer on *Halo 3: ODST*. And he's not joking. After only just a few minutes of getting to know your bickering crew on a UNSC ship cruising miles above Earth's Covenant-wrecked New Mombasa, you're plunged straight down to the city's surface streets in a heavily damaged Orbital Drop pod.

Six hours after impact, you awake — alone, without any idea of where your unit has landed, in a darkened city crawling with enemy forces all looking for your location — and you'll have to piece together the puzzle of what happened to everyone on your drop team. Without a single Spartan in sight. Yikes.

As an ODST (Orbital Drop Shock Trooper) rookie, your non-linear journey through the massive, sprawling metropolis at night will be spent seeking out your unit's scattered locations. Health and assistance are at a premium, but thankfully, you're not entirely alone. The city's A.I. system, the Superintendant, has been watching over you since your none-too-graceful landing, and its help with various computer-controlled machines, like a health-boosting mechanism called an Optician, will be something you come to rely on. After all, you're no Master Chief — your shields won't be regenerating, and you'll need all the help you can get since every big bad from Elites to Grunts has been alerted to your presence, if not your exact location.

And this is where you'll also come to learn the ropes of your spiffy UNSC-equipped visor. It packs in two different abilities — low-light vision and hostile-spotting infrared — and you'll need them both to detect upcoming obstacles and to track down Superintendant-enabled assistance. He's got your back throughout your journey, so he'll highlight areas you need to visit as well as giving Opticians and other points of interest a greenish tint through your visor's lens.

But action-fueled firefights are only part of *ODST*'s yarn. Your search for your scattered teammates is what will propel the storyline as you'll come across different areas and/or items on the city streets that will trigger "flashback" sequences played through the eyes of your vanished crew members.

In one area, we stumbled across a giant steel plate that kicked off a sequence that put us in the boots of Dutch, one of the veterans on your team. Nighttime becomes daytime as you slowly discover what happened when he landed approximately two hours after the slipstream event that scattered your crew (which is about four hours before you woke up).

And this is how *ODST*'s plotline plays out — a really interesting twist that gives the game its unique "classic mystery story" edge, according to Staten. This is no longer all about mere run-'n'-gun brute force; instead, *ODST* takes on shades of "film noir influences, [including] the music," Staten tells us. And there's nothing like a good ol' fashioned mystery to pique our interest.

But if battling unfathomable odds remains in your blood, *ODST*'s Firefight mode and its multiplayer online co-op should delight you with its infinite waves of randomly spawned enemies on your chosen map. In this interesting tweak to *Gears of War 2*'s Horde mode, you'll first pick a map to do battle on. Once the fight begins, you and up to three of your buddies will have a set number of seven lives to share between all of you. And you'll have to conserve them carefully as you're up against five waves per round, three rounds per set, and an unlimited amount of sets...and Brute Chieftains always comprise the last wave in a round. Gulp.

But that's not all. Each set will be further "enhanced" with the effects of skulls. The skull for each Firefight set remains randomly chosen by the game, so you'll be kept on your toes every single turn. If you're skilled enough to survive a set, your pool of lives and ammo locations will be replenished.

The message from our hands-on time with Firefight and the demo we received of *ODST* is that Bungie doesn't mess around. Even though Master Chief may not be anywhere in sight, don't expect this chapter to go out with a whimper.

— Francesca Reyes

> In Firefight mode, Brute Chieftains always comprise the last wave in a round.



► Make like a Bruckheimer flick and go all kablooey, soldiers!

WHEW: Four-player co-op will be an option for campaign junkies. The rookie will remain the rookie, while the remaining three players will suit up as generic ODST members.

OPEN-WORLD HALO: At the start of your journey, the Superintendant grants you a New Mombasa city map that displays just how giant the world is. You're free to roam!

Singularity





"Marty, you're not thinking fourth-dimensionally!"



Think the government — yours or the Russian's — wants you to escape alive?

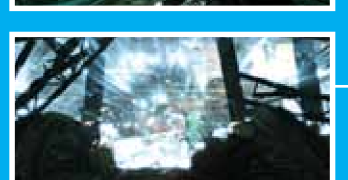


A teaser scene at the end of our demo was not unlike this one: teeming with Soul Leeches.

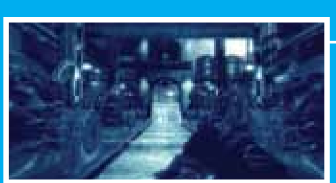
TIME WAVE



Echo Events happen all over the island, revealing scenes from the very moment the E99 went "critical."



Here comes the wave, about to wash you back to the 1950s for just a brief moment of storytelling.



You can move around while this happens, but there's nobody to shoot. Maybe you can just watch?

These poor suckers in the Echo Event are stuck repeating the same moment over and over. Fun!

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: ACTIVISION Developer: RAVEN Multiplayer: YES
Release Date: FALL 2009 For Fans Of: *BioShock*, *Half-Life*, vodka

Reverts are Zeck-infected humans who are not happy in any decade.

Call it the Jack of All Trades Design Theory: cram as many kickass signature elements from other games into your project and simmer the resulting mix until it's cooked evenly all the way through. But it's a risky strategy. Most of the time, a jack of all trades is a master of none.

Not in this case, it seems. We got exclusive hands-on time with *Singularity*, a new IP from Raven Software, one of the most consistently reliable developers in the business. And on paper, it's definitely a "kitchen sink" type of approach: *BioShock*-flavored art direction, a *Half-Life 2* Gravity Gun–esque primary item, and a healthy dose of good ol' time travel thrown in.

So what is it? *Singularity*'s intriguing chrono-bending narrative pits you as modern-day U.S. armed forces pilot Nate Ranco, whose plane crashes on a mysterious island off the coast of Russia that, according to world maps, was not supposed to exist. As the story unfolds, you'll learn about Element 99, a powerful compound discovered by the Russians during the 1950s that manipulates the chronology of items, accelerating or reversing their age. This island — top-secret Katorga 12 — was initially set up as a research outpost to study the element and weaponize it. But a massive accident ruptured the space-time continuum, leading to...unforeseen consequences and the shutdown and cover-up of the island by the Russian government.

> Firing the E99 revolver puts the camera behind the bullet and allows you to steer the round to its target from safely behind cover.

Fast-forward to 2010, and the Russkies decide to take yet another crack at harvesting Element 99. Uh oh...

The level we played takes place approximately halfway through the campaign. After discovering and equipping the game's primary hook — the glove-like Time Manipulation Device that can accelerate or reverse the chronological status (or age) of objects like chairs, buildings, crates, and even explosive barrels — we encountered our first simple puzzle inside one of the buildings in the rundown, 1950s Cold War–era facility. With our progress stopped by a concrete wall, we simply aimed our targeting cursor at the barrier and pressed RB to age the cement. We were able to pass through the crumbled rubble and then rebuild the object by reversing its age with LB, reassembling what turned out to be a staircase, which we could then ascend to continue.

The story is helped along by what we saw next — scenes that Raven dubs Echo Events. Ghosty silhouettes play back what island scientists were doing just as the catastrophic meltdown occurred in the '50s. At this point, a mysterious facehugger-like creature called a Soul Leech attacked and possessed one of the two men. What was that all about? Hmm...

As the gameplay grew more complex over the course of our hands-on time, so too did the story. Walking into a room, we were transported into the Null Zone, an alternate dimension of sorts that Dr. Barisov — the head scientist on the E99 project in the '50s — has been trapped in ever since. He tells you it's an unstable place, and that another E99 wave could wash over the base and blip you back to reality at any moment. As apparently the only sane

continued on pg. 18

And Multiplayer?



Activision senior producer Brian Pass did confirm, unsurprisingly, that *Singularity* will include multiplayer options. But he admits that Raven is still prototyping and experimenting with what works and doesn't — particularly in regards to integrating the time-manipulation elements. For instance, the team realizes that getting trapped in a frozen time bubble sucks if you're the victim, but something like pausing a rocket in midair, then turning it back and returning it to its sender would be an awesome power to control in a multiplayer match.

Given Raven's track record (*Marvel: Ultimate Alliance*, *Hexen* series, *Quake 4*), we're confident they'll come up with something cool. And we know this can be done. Remember the time-bending elements of *TimeShift*'s multiplayer? It was the best part of the game!

SACRILEGE: *Singularity* uses Unreal Engine 3 and is actually Raven's second UE3 title (*Wolverine* was the other). Previously, it had only ever used id Software's tech (or its own).

ANOTHER NOD: As in *BioShock*, the story will also be fleshed out by hidden audio recordings – from different moments in time, of course.

Singularity continued



Time to get sadistic: Age this dude to death, then de-age his buddy.

You'll have to wait for the Zecks to "phase back in" before shooting them.

Hand powers on the left, gun on the right? *BioShock*, anyone?

THEY'RE NOT ALONE: You might be surprised to learn that Raven Software is not the only development studio located in Madison, Wisconsin. Remember the excellent *Prey*? That was developed by Human Head Studios, which was founded there by some ex-Ravenites.

person left, he urges you to help him stop the Russians from toying with Element 99 any further, lest another accident have potentially worldwide, humanity-destroying results.

Back on the battlefield, the level's massive combat finale impressed the gigawatts out of us. In an open courtyard, we were attacked by Reverts, the mutated humans who'd been taken over by the freaky Soul Leeches. As gooey, bile-spewing bipedals, they proved difficult to bring down at first, but they were nothing a few Y Button Repulse blasts from the TMD and some well-placed shotgun blasts wouldn't fix. We turned the corner to find more bad guys — some Reverts and some special ops sent by the government to wipe us out for what we'd seen.

Taking cover behind a concrete sewer pipe, they started hurling grenades. One went off



Does de-aging (and rebuilding) an entire building sound fun? Yes!

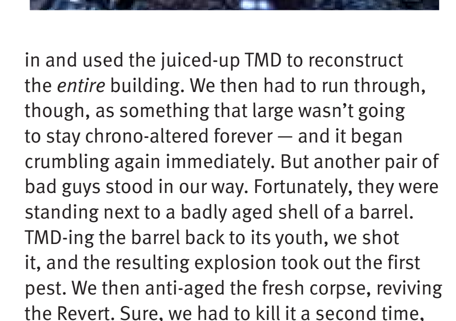
all too close, reducing our sewer-pipe shield to rubble. (Of course, we could simply use our TMD to de-age and rebuild it.) A second grenade landed nearby a moment later, but this time we thought more quickly. We clicked in the right thumbstick to use the TMD's time stasis to grab and snatch the grenade — freezing it in time so it didn't detonate. We then used RT to fire it back to its original owner, taking out one of the targets.

Next we saw the remains of a crate from behind our cover spot. Reversing its age with the TMD, it reassembled, only to see us break it again and collect its bygone contents: an E99 revolver and six rounds. Firing it puts the camera behind the bullet and allows you to steer the round to its target from safely behind cover. Headshot!

Two more enemies remained. One was standing high above us on the other side of the courtyard, parked in the third story of a decimated building underneath a leaning, long-wrecked façade. Accelerating its age with the TMD caused it to give way and fall onto our third attacker, smooshing him instantly.

And the last foe, who stood firing rockets at us from another high floor in the same building, nearly took us out before we realized we could try the same time stasis move to pluck the rocket out of midair inches from our face, turn it around, and fire it back from whence it came. Victory!

With the path finally clear through the courtyard, we came to our goal: an E99-amplifying machine. In a cutscene, Nate plugged



in and used the juiced-up TMD to reconstruct the *entire* building. We then had to run through, though, as something that large wasn't going to stay chrono-altered forever — and it began crumbling again immediately. But another pair of bad guys stood in our way. Fortunately, they were standing next to a badly aged shell of a barrel. TMD-ing the barrel back to its youth, we shot it, and the resulting explosion took out the first pest. We then anti-aged the fresh corpse, reviving the Revert. Sure, we had to kill it a second time, but only after it did us the grin-inducing favor of wiping out his buddy.

By the time we had to put our controllers down, we'd become subscribers to the Jack of All Trades Design Theory. Raven seems to have successfully fused the most memorable elements from its first-person peers, resulting in a combat experience that, at least for one level, was as open-ended as it was morbidly delightful. If the story pays off on top of it all, *Singularity* could be our next shooter obsession.

— Ryan McCaffrey



MORE BIOSHOCK: Your Dr. Tenenbaum equivalent in *Singularity* will be a Russian scientist named Yuri who has been trapped and living on the island for the last 60 years.

Forza Motorsport 3

Now with something for everyone



The car roster is still largely under wraps, but in this image, we can make out an Audi R8, Jaguar XK, BMW M5, Aston Martin DB5, and Ford GT.

Forza 3 adds fully rendered interiors for all its cars — at last!

Take a gander at the new Ladera Test Track in Montserrat, Spain.

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS Developer: TURN 10 STUDIOS Multiplayer: YES
Release Date: OCTOBER 27, 2009 For Fans Of: Speed, and the need for it

If *Forza Motorsport 3* really is going to be the "definitive racing game of this generation," as Turn 10 game director Dan Greenawalt emphasized at this year's E3, then it needs to appeal to more than just the simulation fanatics and car painters that have flocked to the series so far. And that's completely not a newsflash to Turn 10, which is focused on creating a much more accessible — and far prettier — racer.

While *Forza* isn't turning into *Burnout*, it should make realistic driving less daunting by building in some useful assists. Along with auto-braking that lets you drive with one button and an auto-tuner that sets up cars properly, *Forza 3* adds no-guilt rewinding. Tap the Back button any time, as often as you want, to rewind the race five seconds and undo everything from a crappy line through a turn to a car-shattering wipeout — it'll sure save you the trouble of restarting the race like you would've anyway! (And yes, leaderboards will recognize in an as-yet-unspecified way the times that are posted without rewinding.)

And while *Forza 2*'s cars had faces that only a mother could love, *Forza 3* is definitely a much better-looking game. In the races we saw in action, we could tell that the team has constructed an all-new and much better graphics engine (60fps with 10 times more polygons per car, Greenawalt tells us). We also love the newly added cockpit views, the improved damage modeling that lets cars flip and roll over, and even the new interface, which is clean and austerely pretty.

But the biggest new feature that Turn 10 has announced (so far) is the ability to create, edit, and upload HD video from in-game. If the incredibly impressive paint jobs that we all marveled at in *Forza 2* are any indication, we're in for some seriously must-see TV. And speaking of our favorite feature from last time — yes, *Forza 3* will make enhancements to the livery editor, multiplayer, and the auction house, but



Ah, the Lamborghini Murcielago…will we ever get to drive one in real life?

Greenawalt ain't talking about how any of those features are changing just yet. But his confident smile when he assured us that "we aren't resting on our laurels" was most promising.

We did get some interesting details on the new career mode, though. Instead of offering just a roster of events that you make your way through, *Forza 3* develops a personalized calendar of events based on the cars you use most often and the types of events you race most frequently. The game's circuit, drift, drag, oval, and time-trial events have jumped in number from 90 to 250, and if you prefer, you can just access them "the old way" and run what you want when you want to.

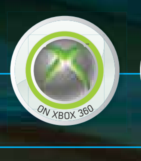
Forza 3 also beefs up the number of tracks in a big way, rocketing up to 100 circuits. Most are in real-world locations (such as returning friends like Suzuka, Nürburgring, and Sebring), but some are fantasy tracks that are "grounded in reality," Greenawalt explains. We checked out a gorgeous run from the mountains in Montserrat, Spain, down to the ocean, but others include trips down the Amalfi coast in Italy and across the American Southwest.

Last but not least, the car lineup is still largely under wraps, but the game includes 400 vehicles from 50 manufacturers, including the Audi R8 V10 and the Nissan 370Z. We can't wait to find out what else Turn 10 has up its sleeve, but one thing we are sure of: between this game and *Need for Speed: Shift*, fall is going to be a great time to love racing real cars, real fast.

— Paul Curthoys

Split/Second

Please fasten your seatbelts







These publisher-provided screens can't convey the sheer sense of face-breaking speed you get on the track. It's nuts.

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: DISNEY Developer: BLACK ROCK STUDIO Multiplayer: YES
Release Date: FIRST HALF 2010 For Fans Of: *Burnout*, *Pure*, blowing stuff up

Can there really be such a thing as a *Call of Duty* racing game? If you strip away all the shooting and military trappings of that series, you're left with nothing but sublime, adrenaline-fueled spectacle. Put that on a racetrack, then get behind the wheel, and *Split/Second* is the most likely result.

Once you've pressed the pedal, your path to victory is fraught with environmental danger that you yourself can wreak. Both hairpin-curve drifts and handbrake spins boost your Power Play gauge, which you can then use at certain points during each lap to terrorize fellow racers by causing track catastrophes both big and small.

On a course that winds around an airport, we drifted and spun until two parts of our three-part meter (divided into two blue-colored Power Play gauges and one red one) had maxed out, à la Black Rock's own *Pure*. As two cars whizzed past us, they neared a part of the track that passed under a helicopter dangling giant construction materials. A blue icon prompted us to press the X button; how could we resist? And with some good timing, we unleashed those crushing objects onto the track below to "interrupt" our opponents' racing lines.

But the biggest payoff? Building up enough juice to unfurl the massive red-colored Power Plays, accessible only when you've maxed out your entire meter. Cause this level of Power Play, and the damage is (sometimes literally) through the roof, prompting anything from a giant communications tower to crash onto the asphalt to an actual plane to come screeching across the airfield. Time it right, and you can wreck all comers and cause a long enough delay to jockey to first place. But be warned: those guys have the same abilities, so that tower may just have your name on it if you're not wise.

Spectacle-laden multiplayer is promised, but details remain light. For now, we're just eager for another go.

— Francesca Reyes



Split/Second's stunt movie-themed gameworld is a grab bag of epic wrecks.

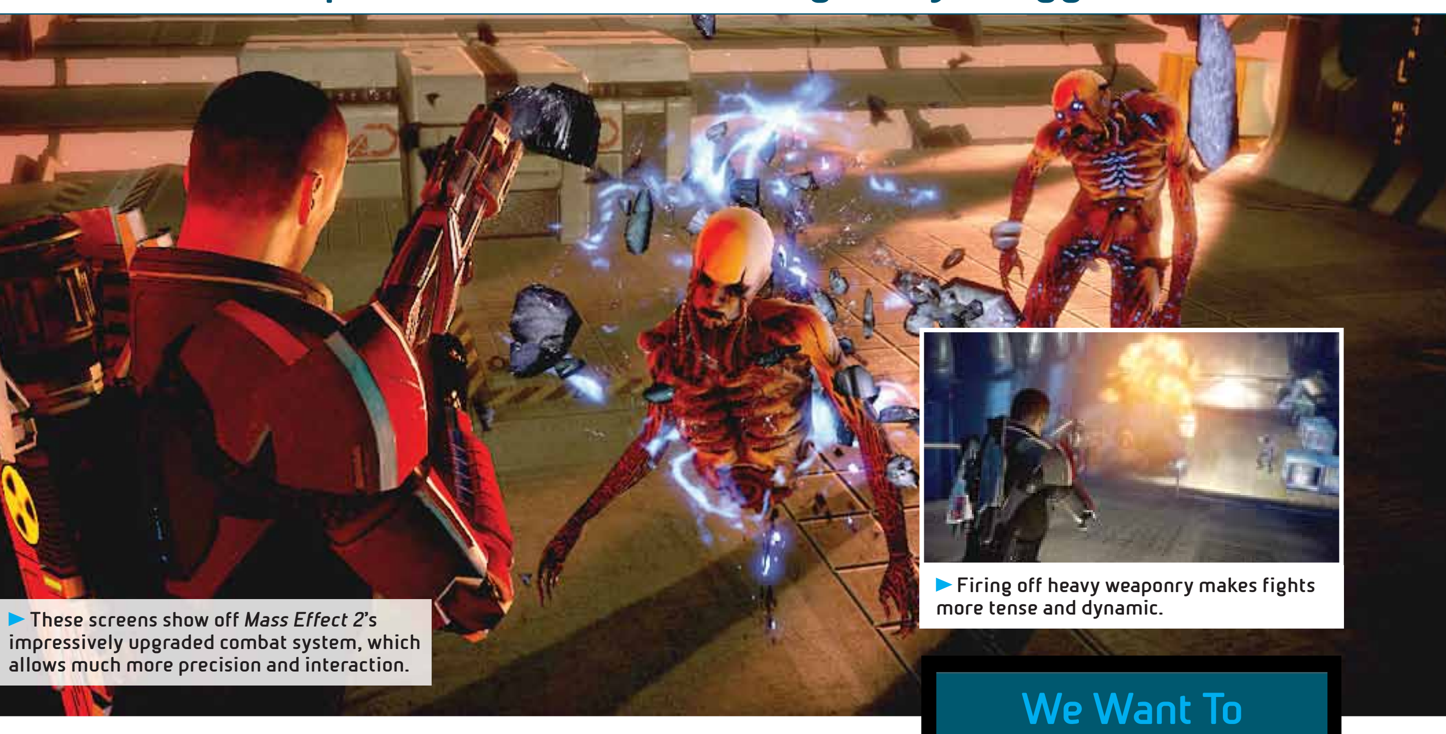
DON'T DRINK & SIM #1: We got to try *Forza 3* at E3 in an awesome motion simulator, complete with a three-screen cockpit that tilted and rumbled like a wild carnival ride…

DON'T DRINK & SIM #2: …unfortunately, the stiff cocktail we'd just polished off made the ride more than a little too wild. Now that's realism!

Mass Effect 2



Rumors of Shepard's death have been greatly exaggerated…sorta



▶ These screens show off *Mass Effect 2*'s impressively upgraded combat system, which allows much more precision and interaction.

▶ Firing off heavy weaponry makes fights more tense and dynamic.

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: EA Developer: BIOWARE Multiplayer: NO
Release Date: Q1 2010 For Fans Of: RPGs, alien ladies (and dudes), sci-fi

Why won't Joker just freakin' abandon ship? Commander Shepard is barking out orders that direct everyone to evacuate a clearly besieged *Normandy*. In fact, stuff is going nuts — panels are short-circuiting in the long corridors, crew members are scuttling around in a state of panic — but for some reason, your trusty pilot is being a pain in the backside by steadfastly refusing to follow his peers to the escape pods. As captain, now's your time to shine…

With project director Casey Hudson cooing background information and highlights, our attention is completely focused on what's going on onscreen in front of us. Shepard dashes down the hallways, dodging floating debris wrenched loose by attacking enemy ships. Dramatic camera angles spotlight the chaos going on both inside and outside the *Normandy*. And when you're finally able to confront Joker at the ship's main controls? He's still not ready to give up his station and claims he wants to go down with the ship. Oh, please. A very, very stern order or two later, and he's sent packing to the nearest escape pod, leaving you to try to salvage control, attempt to fight back against the enemy, and ensure that the rest of the stragglers are safely jettisoned from the deteriorating ship.

But what happens next, we absolutely didn't see coming.

Decked out in a leaky, space-walking atmosphere suit, Shepard's attempts to stave off impending doom are met with…failure. After a few more harrowing moments, you're tossed straight out of the ship and into the black of zero-G space, where Shepard convulses and…dies. Yikes. Hudson chimes in with an ominous word of warning that yes, death is something that's very real and can happen if you don't consider the consequences of your conversations and actions. Case in point, if you didn't earn enough trust from Joker before the *Normandy* is attacked, you may want to consider investing in a better space helmet.

While we're not entirely sure when this scenario plays out in the game and we're not completely sure that Shepard was 100 percent down for the count from the demo we saw — you can count on one thing. We're going to jockey to be first in line to find out.

— Francesca Reyes



▶ Ordering party members to new positions and cover is much more fluid in *Mass Effect 2*.

We Want To Recruit Him!



We also got to check out the introduction of Thane, a weirdly pious assassin who swoops in to take out a female asari criminal and all of her cohorts. Is he a bad guy? Or is he simply a good guy with a really creepy, hissing voice and his own agenda? Add him to your party and find out.

SETTLE UP: With the second (and final) DLC for *Mass Effect 1* coming at last, you might want to play through one more time and build the Shepard you want for *Mass Effect 2*.

Assassin's Creed 2

I believe it can fly



Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: UBISOFT Developer: UBISOFT MONTREAL Multiplayer: NO
Release Date: NOVEMBER 2009 For Fans Of: Venice, stabbing...and shooting!

So many ways to assassinate, so little time. In our latest demo of *Assassin's Creed 2*, that was the second thing we noticed. The first was how pretty and detailed this videogame Venice is, especially the varied, lifelike crowds that amble about.

But back to the killing — as the mission opens, Renaissance hero Ezio sits on a bench and is told that Leonardo says "the machine is ready." He stands up, knifes someone, and neatly sits the corpse in his place on the bench without anyone noticing. No, you can't do that in real life.

As Ezio moves off and begins climbing a tower, we were struck by the gorgeous vista — the rooftops of Venice unfolded into the distance as fireworks popped overhead. Reaching the top, Ezio deals with a patrolling guard by simply hauling him over the railing and dropping him to his death. He then dons da Vinci's flying machine (not the only time in the game you'll use it, we're told) and soars between thermals, making his way through the skies to land inside an otherwise-impenetrable fortress. There, he busts a few more moves: dropping on someone to kill them from above, springing forward into a double-kill where each of his hidden blades ganks a separate enemy, throwing sand and smoke bombs to confuse opponents, and even firing a badass wrist-mounted pistol (it's thunderously loud). It was a riveting gameplay sequence that left us convinced *Assassin's Creed 2* is bound to be one of the biggest games of the year.

Back in the present, Desmond's portion of the festivities picks up exactly where the first game ended — literally one second later, an Ubisoft rep told us. And while some of your questions about what's going on with all the time-traveling through ancestral memories will be answered, some of them won't. Sigh...that means more cliffhangers!

— Paul Curthoys



▶ To stay aloft in the flying machine, you'll need to seek out thermals created by fires that your allies set for that purpose.



▶ Yup, you can stab two fools at once — one per hidden blade!

Lego Rock Band

A four-piece ban...never mind





Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE ENT.
Developer: HARMONIX/TT GAMES Release Date: FALL 2009

Honestly, our first question as we sat down to check out *Lego Rock Band* was, "Why?" As in, why even make this game? Turns out they had a fair answer: "It makes perfect sense to mix the world's best party game with Lego's humor, whimsy, and family-friendliness," a Warner Bros. rep told us.

In that spirit, the game tells a comical rags-to-riches rock story that takes your band to some crazy locations for gigs...and by "crazy," we mean underwater, inside a volcano, and on a construction site where you must demolish a building with the power of rock. (Somewhere, Jack Black just raised the ol' devil horns.) The Lego license comes into play as you build your character, buy and construct vehicles to travel between gigs, and yes, on the note streams, where colored bars are replaced with bricks. For the little ones in your life, you can turn on a Super Easy mode where all they have to do is strum — no button-holding required. We played a couple of tunes, including Vampire Weekend's "A-Punk," and it definitely felt like *Rock Band* with little Lego dudes. If that makes you smile, this game will, too.

— Paul Curthoys

▶ We can just see that little Lego guy belting out "Kung Fu Fighting" and "The Final Countdown." Can't you?





▶ Other tracks include Foo Fighters' "Breakout" and Pink's "So What."

NEED THE BACKGROUND?: Looking for the big picture on *Assassin's Creed 2*? Check out the in-depth preview back in our June 2009 issue.

Dark Void





A scientist, a cargo pilot, and a bipedal slug walk into the Bermuda Triangle…

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: CAPCOM Developer: AIRTIGHT GAMES Multiplayer: NO
Release Date: FALL/WINTER 2009 For Fans Of: *Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge*, *The Rocketeer*, Nikola Tesla

▶ The standard ground-based combat plays out a lot like that found in *Gears of War*…

▶ …but it puts its own spin on things when you start leaping *over* cover in your jetpack.

Of all the great franchises Microsoft has frustratingly sat on since the Xbox era began (*High Heat Baseball*, *MechWarrior*, *Links*, and so on), *Crimson Skies* is the one we remember most fondly. It's been dormant since its 2003 Xbox Live–defining turn, and it doesn't look like we'll ever see another one. But thanks to *Dark Void*, we no longer care. The game's being built just a couple of miles from Xbox headquarters in Redmond, and *Dark Void*'s development team includes over a dozen members of FASA Studio — creator of that beloved original-Xbox action-flight game. After spending a day at their office playing several levels, we can see that *Void* takes many of its cues from *Crimson*, upping the ante in nearly every conceivable way.

The one-upsmanship begins in the story department. While *Crimson Skies* kept us interested with an alternate-reality World War II tale, *Dark Void* gets exponentially crazier…and a lot more riveting. As a cargo pilot named Will, you're on a routine flight that ends up with our hero flying into the Bermuda Triangle, where he's somehow transported to another dimension called, naturally, the Dark Void. There he finds his ex-girlfriend, Ava, who seems to know more about what's going on than he does, Airtight tells us. He also encounters famed electricity-obsessed scientist Nikola Tesla.

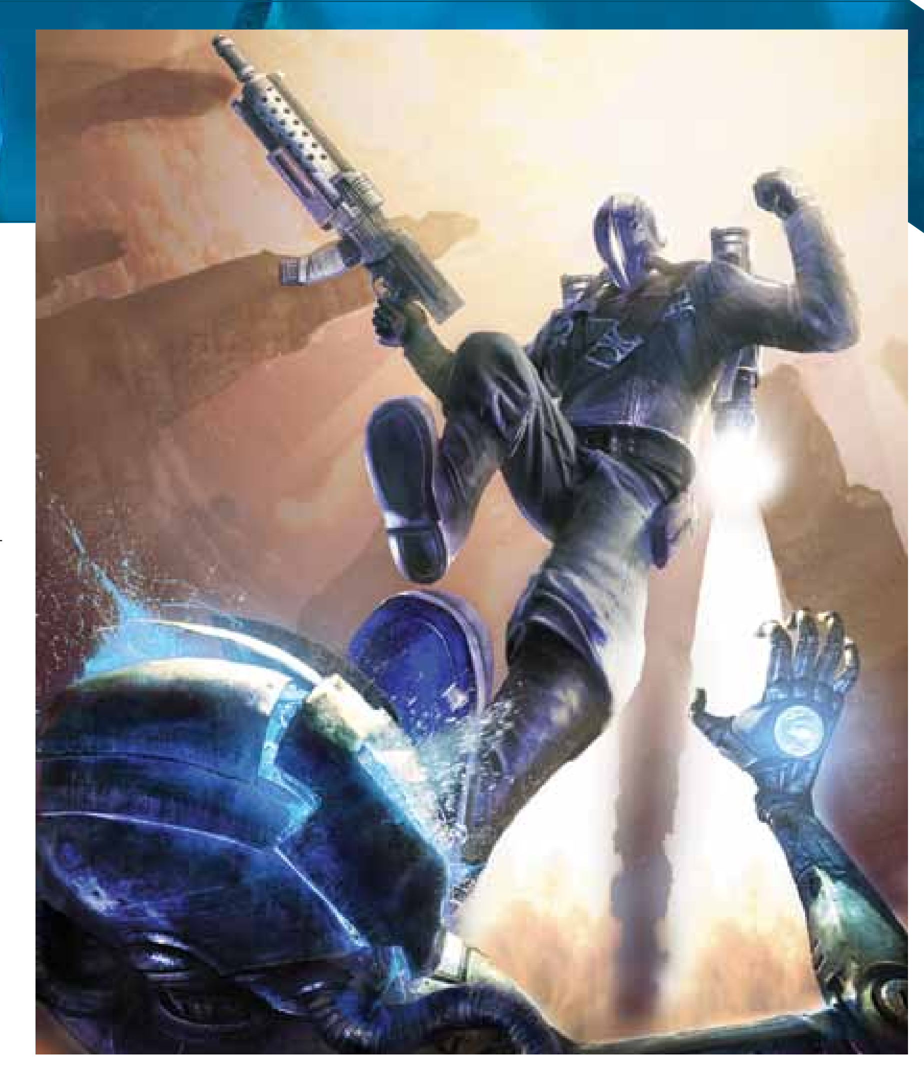
As you explore the Void and attempt to find your way home, you'll face foes that appear to be robots. A closer inspection, though, reveals that each inorganic body is actually a shell for a small, slug-like creature — the lowest evolutionary form of a race of creatures known as the Watchers. Naturally, they long to get to Earth and conquer it (it's worth noting that Airtight kept phrasing it as their "return to" Earth…hmm…), but they're opposed by the Survivors, a group of humans (some Void-born) who are reluctant to trust any outsiders. Winning their confidence will be a key story arc in the game.

Of course, Will, Ava, and Dr. Tesla all just want to get out — and stop the Watchers before they do — so it's the button-bashing, thumbstick-twisting action that matters most. Here, *Void* separates itself from the rest of the action genre by mixing three control schemes simultaneously — on-foot, jetpack, and vehicle. That would be a challenge for any game, and it's one that *Void* will live or die by. Fortunately, it's well on its way to fruition, if our extensive hands-on time is anything to go by. While our first brief session with the gamepad earlier this year sent us repeatedly slamming into cliffsides and walls anytime we engaged our jetpack, the controls and flight mechanic have since been balanced so that we were much more comfortable while in Rocketeer mode. No wipeouts, even.

Our first level was an early one titled "Spare Parts." Set just after Will straps on the Tesla-built jetpack, this area gives you a chance to experiment and get a feel for both the aerial maneuvering and the game's second lynchpin feature: vertical cover. Intriguingly, much of *Dark Void* goes up or down (in fact, the team advised us to simply look up or down if we ever got lost). Pressing X while underneath a ledge will make Will automatically fly up and grab onto it. From there, you can blind fire, hold LT and aim, or press B when up close for a melee attack.

We quickly found ourselves favoring the ammo-conserving fisticuffs,

continued on pg. 28 ▶▶



Multiplayer Schmultiplayer

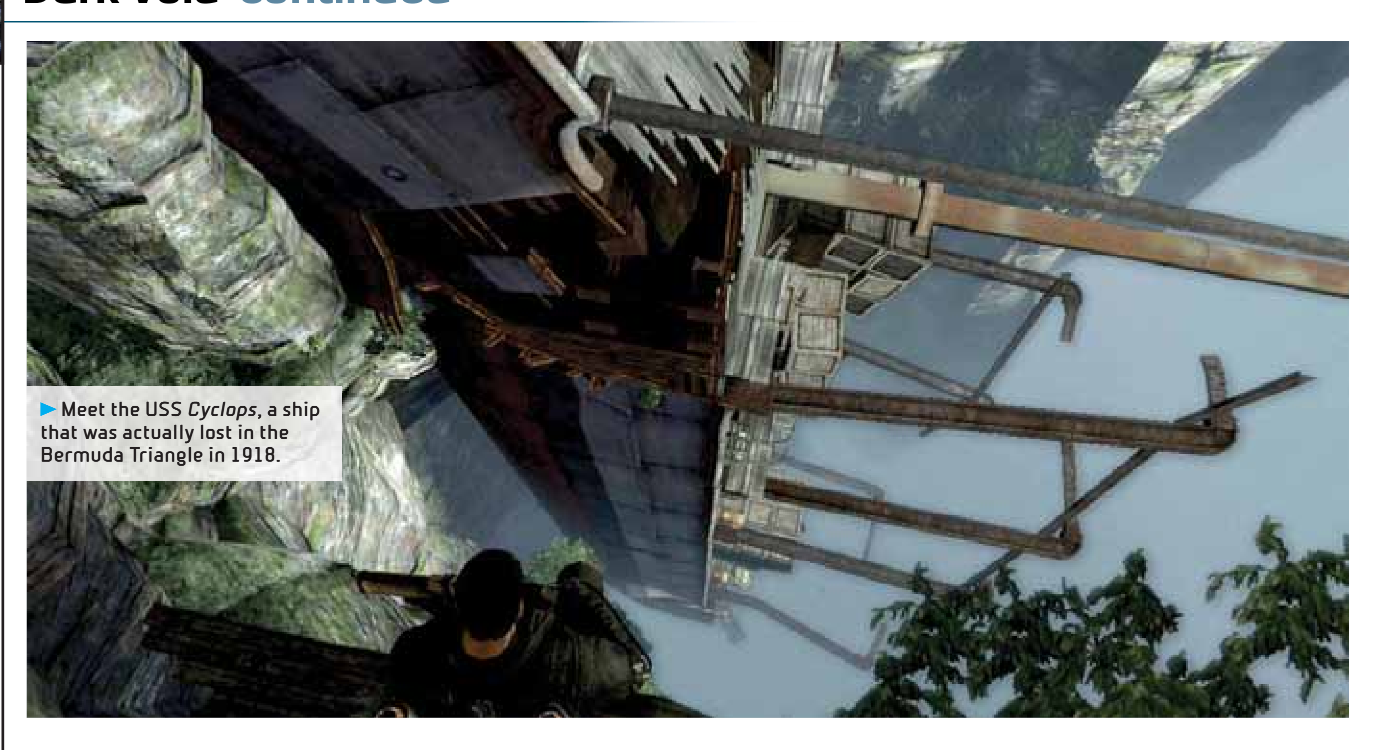
We're going on record as saying that we're happy *Dark Void* will be shipping without a multiplayer mode. For one, it means we'll be able to earn all 1,000 Achievement points without having to get to the top of any online rankings. It also means Airtight won't be half-assing a pedestrian deathmatch mode at the expense of the solo campaign.

But fear not, there will be replayability. For every enemy you kill, you'll collect red orbs containing tech points, which you can cash in to upgrade your weapons at mid-mission tech lockers. (These tech lockers also refill your ammo.) Of course, you can't max out all of your weapons in a single playthrough (though your upgrades carry over into your repeat campaigns), and you'll need to go through once to unlock the highest difficulty level anyway. So don't worry about value: *Dark Void* will have plenty of it.

IF YOU MISSED IT: *Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge* is available as an Xbox Original for 1,200 Microsoft Points ($15) on Xbox Live Marketplace. We highly recommend it.

STORYTELLERS: Look carefully around each level and you'll find journal entries from other famous historical luminaries lost in the Void, such as Amelia Earhart.

Dark Void continued



▶ Meet the USS *Cyclops*, a ship that was actually lost in the Bermuda Triangle in 1918.

skittering around the bottoms of ledges with our pack until we were directly beneath our target, where we could then press B and be treated to one of several throw-'em-down-to-their-doom animations. Besides, doing it that way meant we wouldn't have bodies raining down on us after we shot them with our gun. (*Dark Void* packs three human firearms and three Watcher weapons.) In a smart little design move, if a falling corpse hits you while you're in vertical cover, you'll need to do a quick button-mashing quick-time event to hang on and not get knocked off with the body. Equally interesting is the option to scoot by everybody, jet all the way to the top ledge, and then press Y to flip yourself around so that you're now facing down while still in vertical cover, giving you the high ground.

Later, in a chapter titled "Into the Void," we took on our first mini-boss: a sort of floating seahorse-from-hell called the Knight. Not content to simply pepper us with gunfire, it also has a rocket-equivalent that it's smart enough to fire behind you, causing you grief even while you're behind cover. Constant X-axis movement will get the job done, or you could choose to bob up and down in the air with your jetpack and torture it that way. But we had more fun mixing those two tactics and cooking grenades from behind cover, timing it just right so our toss would explode in midair right next to the Knight.

This fusion of combat options appears to be *Dark Void*'s calling card. In a later mission titled "Prison Escape," we battled every which way possible. We jetpacked around shooting stationary turrets, hijacked UFOs out of midair, hovered and shot foes, and even took an approach to one situation that seemed to genuinely entertain our Airtight hosts: On a high, balcony-like platform, rows of cover blocked our way inside the structure and our goal. With a half-dozen enemies between us and our destination, our traditional *Gears of War* mindset would've told us to methodically stop-and-pop our way along the cover, eventually making our way inside. Being far more impatient and sadistic than that, however, we instead hovered high above our enemies — well out of their accurate weapon range — and dropped grenades on them, rendering their cover useless. "I think you got four with that [grenade]!" lead designer Bradley Rebh exclaimed.

> It doesn't look like we'll ever see another *Crimson Skies*. But thanks to *Dark Void*, we no longer care.

Whether *Dark Void*'s clever blend of sci-fi story and real-life historical figures actually pays off by the end of the campaign remains to be seen, but we're definitely convinced that its seamless mix of ground, air, and vehicle-based combat is its meal ticket. If you played *Crimson Skies*, you've probably already pre-ordered this, but if you didn't, *Dark Void* will show you what you missed.

— Ryan McCaffrey







AIRTIGHT INDEED: During our tour of Airtight Games' offices, we were stopped just once...at a door that separated us from another small group of people working on a second, unannounced project. Maybe they got the *Crimson Skies* license from Microsoft. Hey, we can dream, can't we?

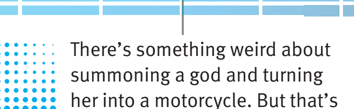
MULTIPLE EAR-GASMS: The symphonic score in *Dark Void* is being handled by famed composer Bear McCreary, who is perhaps best known for the themes of *Battlestar Galactica*.

Final Fantasy XIII

Now paging...Shiva, god of ice

ON XBOX 360

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: SQUARE ENIX Developer: SQUARE ENIX Multiplayer: TBA
Release Date: SPRING 2010 For Fans Of: New RPG combat engines, mythical summons, hot graphics



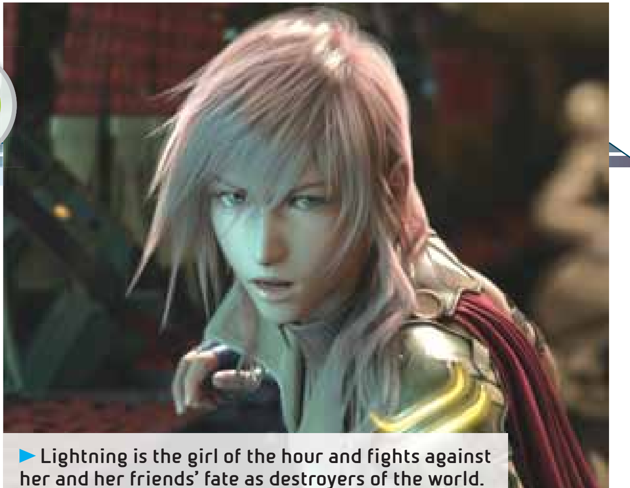
There's something weird about summoning a god and turning her into a motorcycle. But that's exactly what happened during our latest peek at *Final Fantasy XIII*, the newest in the series that spawned thousands of turn-based-RPG imitators. And the fact that you can ride that motorcycle around and drop icicles that kill enemies? Well, let's step back a bit...

The bike battle we glimpsed is a combat scenario referred to as Gestalt mode — a new approach to a *Final Fantasy*–series staple of summoning mythical creatures to beat down on the bad guy. But instead of simply calling on them and having them swoop in and lay waste, then go back to wherever they came from, each character in your party will be "paired" with a specific summon. In the case of Shiva, she's tied to *FFXIII*'s resident badass-with-a-bandanna, Snow.

Once he invoked Shiva, the rest of the party disappeared, leaving him to fight alongside Shiva's physical form — in this case, a set of twins wielding a giant wheel. That's not too weird, right? But in Gestalt mode, the twins transform into...a motorcycle that Snow can hop onto to ride around the battle area. Game director Motomu Toriyama claims that this segment in a fight will feel more "action-oriented" than the usual command-driven, turn-based approach of regular combat.



▶ Okay, so enough talk about that strange god-powered motorcycle...here it is in full Technicolor glory!



▶ Lightning is the girl of the hour and fights against her and her friends' fate as destroyers of the world.

But that "regular combat" doesn't necessarily follow the old *Final Fantasy*–series rules, either. Having stacking attacks that depend on the number of "slots" in your active time bar mixes up the action, allowing you to choose different ways to battle an enemy. Got all that straight? Whew!

Riding gods and stacking attacks? It certainly seems that *Final Fantasy*'s Xbox 360 debut will be a fresh experience for series noobs and veterans alike.

— Francesca Reyes

Dragon Age: Origins

Needs to breathe more fire

ON XBOX 360 HANDS-ON

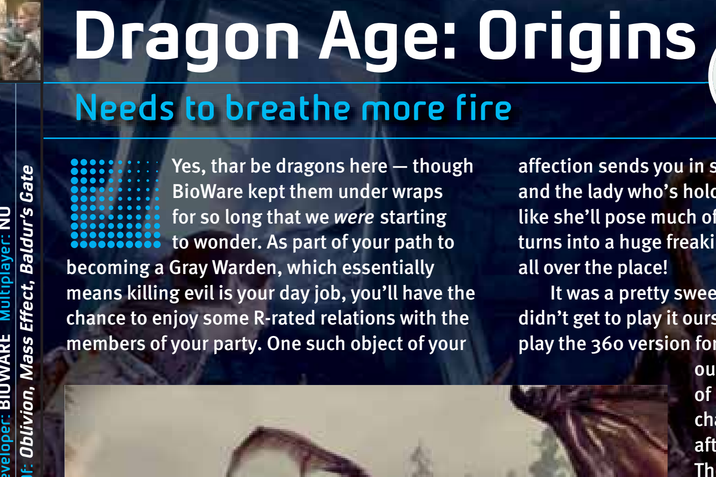
Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: EA Developer: BIOWARE Multiplayer: NO
Release: OCTOBER 20, 2009 For Fans Of: *Oblivion, Mass Effect, Baldur's Gate*

Yes, thar be dragons here — though BioWare kept them under wraps for so long that we *were* starting to wonder. As part of your path to becoming a Gray Warden, which essentially means killing evil is your day job, you'll have the chance to enjoy some R-rated relations with the members of your party. One such object of your affection sends you in search of a magical book, and the lady who's holding onto it doesn't look like she'll pose much of a challenge...until she turns into a huge freakin' dragon and spews fire all over the place!

It was a pretty sweet moment, and while we didn't get to play it ourselves, we did see and play the 360 version for the first time, hacking our way through a stretch of dungeon and then chatting up a bunch of NPCs afterward back at camp. Though we dig the richness of this universe, we have to say that *Dragon Age* wasn't as instantly seductive as *Mass Effect* was the first time we saw it running on Xbox 360. We love swords as much as lasers, but *Dragon Age*'s dialogue interface is text-based and even clunkier than the one that *Fallout 3* uses — you pick your response from a blob of text at the bottom of the screen, and your character never actually speaks, which detracts from the storytelling.

As far as visuals go, the 360 version's also a ways behind its PC counterpart at this stage, and while cycling between characters was cool, actually controlling each individual felt like an imprecise affair. The good news? BioWare's nowhere near finished working on the game, and they obviously have the chops to whip this bad boy into shape before October.

— Paul Curthoys



▶ This shot from the PC version proves without a doubt that *Dragon Age* will indeed have fights with dragons. Yay!



▶ Tap a button to take control of a different party member at any time.

QUIRKIEST GAMES IN BIOWARE HISTORY?: That's an easy one. The two titles that stick out most on BioWare's game-ography are *MDK 2* (it's a third-person shooter!) and the *Sonic* RPG.

Alan Wake



Turn around, bright eyes

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: MICROSOFT Developer: REMEDY Multiplayer: NO
Release Date: SPRING 2010 For Fans Of: *Silent Hill*, *Twin Peaks*, rechargeable flashlight batteries



▶ Go toward the light! You're safe there!



▶ The full day-night cycle looks amazing in motion.

Frantic. That's the first thing that comes to mind when you're scrambling to aim your flashlight at a truck flying through the air at you. Then panic — as a shadowy group of growling, darkened figures lunge at you in the woods, equipped with axes. The only way to survive is to aim your pinpoint beam of flashlight fire at whatever's attacking you, weakening them for the final blow from a gun — or whatever you may have on you.

That sweaty-palmed terror may not lie at the true heart of the finally revealed *Alan Wake*, but it sure as hell feels like it when you're struggling to fire up a generator in the middle of a complete beatdown by forces that don't always take human form. Animated objects — like a giant bulldozer, for instance — roar to life in the dark; menacing whispers bite at you through the trees; and giant flocks of shapeless birds swoop down to knock you from an already rickety tram high above a massive canyon. Welcome to Bright Falls, chump — hope you brought plenty of flashlight batteries.

While the white-knuckle sprints from light-source to light-source (*Wake*'s frightful creatures thrive in the dark but shrink from the light) drive the action in the game, your brain isn't left to fend for itself. Finnish developer Remedy (*Max Payne* series) has crafted a lovely narrative tease that winds throughout the nightmare: As writer-blocked author Alan Wake, you've spent the past two years in an artless, airless attempt to pen your next great novel. Your wife tries to do you a solid by bringing you to the town of Bright Falls to get your writing groove back, but her best-laid plans go exactly how best-laid plans usually go — incredibly wrong. In fact, she's gone missing. And now you're left to chase after her fading trail, with only pages from one of your novels — that you don't remember writing — to goad you on. Every page you come across, scattered in the environments around you, pre-empts events that are happening in real life, so best find the rest of those pages…and fast.

And this is how our time with *Alan Wake* begins — trapped in a log cabin with Alan's skittish literary agent bitching about the fact that, well, you're both trapped in a log cabin. Remedy's self-labeled "psychological action thriller" may deliver plenty of thrills and chills, but it doesn't miss an opportunity to dish out a little dark, goofy humor now and again. (The team proudly deems super-quirky TV series *Twin Peaks* one of *Wake*'s primary influences.)

Leaving your agent behind, you push out into the night to meet up with a local sheriff claiming to have "more pages" to the mysterious novel. Will they help you find your wife? That's what you're dodging through the pitch-black forest to find out.

You're equipped with a pistol and a flashlight, and the mechanics are easy — keep your light beam pointed at anything that moves. Most non-human objects weaken and lose their menace if you hold the beam on them long enough. But those swarms of scary, axe-wielding meanies? You have to weaken them first with light, then blast them with your pistol…or with a flare gun. If you have flares, you can ward off nemeses simply by carrying one around for as long as possible. But if you're lucky enough to have a flare gun, get ready for some serious fireworks. Shooting a flare into a crowd of evildoers can set off a multi-target free-for-all of instantaneous carnage. Awesome.

And after we're chased by a giant bulldozer, then hop into an abandoned car (whose headlights let you plow through baddies) to find the final page at an isolated lighthouse, the giant beacon of light cutting through the surrounding shadows goes abruptly dark. Our short-but-breathtaking demo of *Alan Wake* is over; here come the bad men…

Cliffhangers be damned, we want more.

— Francesca Reyes

▶ Your search for Rusty, the local sheriff, brings you here, where you find him…well, that'd be a spoiler, now, wouldn't it?



▶ What looks harmless during the day takes on all-new meanings once the sun goes down. Hello, bulldozer!

Horror's Leading Men

Sure, you're just an Everyman fighting the good fight against "unknown forces," but why is it that brunettes always get the creepy business end of the survival-horror stick? Alan, you were doomed from the start. Blondes do have more fun.



HARRY MASON
Silent Hill



EDWARD CARNBY, *Alone in the Dark* series



JAMES SUNDERLAND, *Silent Hill 2: Restless Dreams* (Okay, so he's kinda got dirty-blonde hair. Still…)



ALEX SHEPHERD, *Silent Hill: Homecoming*

TUNE IN: *Alan Wake* is structured like a TV series, but every episode is contained on one disc. That would seem to lend itself well to the possibility of DLC, no?

SELF-WRITTEN: Despite influences ranging from Stephen King to TV's *Lost*, *Alan Wake* lead writer Sam Lake comments, "Surprisingly, many writers write about writers."

Homefront





Invasion never looked so good



That's the unmanned but heavily armed Goliath, making mincemeat out of North Korean invaders at your command.

To guide the Goliath, you use a laser designator similar to the one that calls in airstrikes in other games.

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: THQ Developer: KAOS STUDIOS Release Date: TBD
Multiplayer: YES For Fans Of: *Half-Life*, *Freedom Fighters*

As E3 began earlier this summer, we knew big things were coming. Announcements like Natal and *Halo: Reach*, while huge, were the kind of surprises that had just a smidgen of their thunder stolen ahead of time by the rumor mill. But we were completely bowled over when we discovered that THQ and developer Kaos had kept the lid on what looks like one of the next great shooters: *Homefront*.

Why the fuss? It reminded us of the first time we saw *Half-Life* — it mirrors that familiar mix of in-game storytelling and ferocious combat. Written by renowned screenwriter John Milius (the guy behind *Apocalypse Now* and *Red Dawn*, to name a couple), *Homefront* flashes forward to the year 2027. After a decade-long energy crisis*, the U.S. is in shambles — to the point where North Korea invaded two years ago and now occupies the country. Naturally, you're part of the American Civil Resistance, trying to beat back the incursion in places ranging from rural Colorado to San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. We love the prospect of a shooter that doesn't involve aliens or zombies, but rather plausible enemies in very familiar settings — like backyards, malls, and city streets.

> *Homefront* won't have scripted sequences; the action will develop on the fly.

On top of that, *Homefront* is already incredibly good-looking for a game that has no official release date yet (our money's on late 2010 or early 2011). Part of that appeal comes from some very sharp-looking and realistic settings, like the farmhouse we saw getting shredded in a massive firefight, and part of it comes from how the story-telling happens in-game without cutscenes or camera movements that aren't controlled by the player. As with Valve's classic, you're not running around talking to townsfolk or leveling up; *Homefront* simply tells its tale as you move around in quieter moments…that are often violently disrupted.

In the sequence we saw, you awake in a safehouse in Montrose, Colorado, surrounded by leafy vegetation in what turns out to be a greenhouse. You're hurt and you know the occupiers are hot on your trail, pursuing in jeeps. As you gather yourself and walk through the safehouse (which is more like a compound), you talk to the leader as he orders everyone to start packing up and shutting things down. You've blown their cover, and he's a bit grumpy about losing a place that has reliable power and water.

Suddenly, the North Koreans show up, and the battle that begins is brutal in its suddenness and intensity. As the onslaught starts, you're ordered to move across the street, where you collect a futuristic-looking rocket launcher. Kaos tells us that it's working with military consultants to include realistic next-gen weaponry, like an adaptive rifle that uses both 5.56 and 5.7 ammo. And something called the Goliath, which we're admittedly pretty hot for already.

But first, you have to dispatch those jeeps with a few rockets. Kaos is using tech it calls the Drama Engine, which, like *Left 4 Dead*'s director, brings the action to you. When the player in the demo picked up that rocket launcher, it sent the jeeps over to his position. In other words, *Homefront* won't have scripted sequences; the action will develop on the fly, and your path to survival should be different every time.

Back in the battle, the resistance is getting hammered, even with the help of that rocket launcher. You're instructed to get the Goliath into the action. (Described as an unmanned death jeep, it apparently exists today as an actual real-world prototype!) You use a laser designator to point it at the enemy; the Goliath crashes through an entire house, rolls over enemy vehicles, and unleashes a salvo of rockets that ends the demo with an impressive bang.

Along with this very promising solo campaign, Kaos is also working on a "very substantial" multiplayer complement. Given the terrific 50-player battles it fashioned for *Frontlines* and the dramatic impact of this demo, we'll be keeping a close eye on how *Homefront* turns out.

— Paul Curthoys



In quiet moments like these, the story unfolds in-game. It won't stay quiet for long…



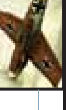
Wow…things must've really gone to hell if North Korea could invade the U.S. by 2027!



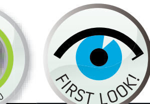
After the impressive multiplayer Kaos crafted in *Frontlines*, we can't wait to see what it has up its sleeve for *Homefront*.

*ENERGY CRISIS?: If that reminds you of Kaos' first game, *Frontlines: Fuel of War*, you nailed it. Kaos finds the theme important and considers *Homefront* a spiritual successor to *Frontlines*.

MORE MILIUS: *Homefront*'s screenwriter also penned *Conan the Barbarian* and *Clear & Present Danger*. And he wrote the legendary "I love the smell of napalm in the morning" line.



IL-2 Sturmovik: Birds of Prey

Deluxe dogfighting

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: 505 GAMES Developer: GAIJIN ENTERTAINMENT/1C COMPANY
Multiplayer: YES Release Date: SEPTEMBER 2009 For Fans Of: Flying and shooting...at the same time

If you're like us, you've done most of your dogfighting in the *Ace Combat* series, and you're only vaguely aware of *IL-2 Sturmovik* as some hardcore flight sim on the PC. Yeah, that's wrong (at least as far as this installment goes), and in the best possible way — this game is already terrifically pretty on Xbox 360, and it's built to be controller-friendly. Oh, you can hook up your fancy Hori flightstick and grapple with Sim mode, which locks you into cockpit view to cope with realistic handling, full damage, and limited fuel. We'll be over on the Arcade side, thanks, enjoying the unlimited ammo and the assists as we blast through some of the most famous air and ground battles of World War II.

We checked out two of those — the Battles of Britain and the Bulge, respectively — and were instantly impressed by the gorgeous terrain, especially after skimming the treetops and finding that it never got ugly and low-res. The game packs in a healthy 50 missions across those two battles and four others, and also includes multiplayer of the usual deathmatch variety.

The classic dogfighting and bombing combat sequences look harrowing and intense without the help of fancy modern tools like lock-on tones, and we're stoked that in planes like the B-17 (one of 12 you can fly; others include the Spitfire and the Mustang), you can cycle between gunnery positions while the A.I. flies your plane. If the gameplay turns out to be as impressive as it seemed during our demo, *IL-2* has "sleeper hit" written all over it.

— Paul Curthoys

► Yup, the game really does look this pretty running on Xbox 360.





Avatar

You need a new TV

Platform: XBOX 360 Pub: UBISOFT Dev: UBISOFT MONTREAL Multiplayer: TBA
Release: DECEMBER 2009 For Fans Of: James Cameron flicks, blue people, 3D

What's that about a new TV? You'll think you need one if you ever see *Avatar* running in 3D on a 103-inch stereoscopic TV. Once you pop on the glasses, you'll be awestruck by how 3D effects turn what otherwise looks like a pretty standard third-person shooter into something spectacular. Your character strides nearby in the foreground as spent ammo shells jingle all over the place and pursuing enemies disappear deep into the foliage in a way that's just mesmerizing.

Of course, if, like us, you're not rich enough to spring for a stereoscopic set in a recession economy, the game runs just fine on your regular HDTV, and in that case, it's less about the wow power and more about how Ubisoft is fashioning an intriguing adjunct to James Cameron's holiday blockbuster-to-be. In this sci-fi epic, you start out working for the RDA Corporation, which is mining valuable resources of the beautiful but incredibly hostile and lethal world of Pandora. And "beautiful" really is an understatement, as these lush jungles are filled with exotic creatures...that want to eat you...and pretty, lush, bioluminescent flowers and vegetation...that also want to eat you!

Thankfully, the game has its own (mysterious) tale to tell, rather than recapping the movie's, and as you progress, you can decide to change sides and fight as one of the Na'vi, the blue-skinned species of giants who are native to Pandora. Instead of flying wimpy choppers like RDA chumps, the Na'vi whip gracefully through the skies on the backs of fiery birds and completely take the RDA to pieces with axes and arrows. We're in!

— Paul Curthoys

► That fancy chopper's gonna get stomped by the Na'vi's flying mounts!



► There's a reason they need all those big guns in a pre-industrial jungle...



Brink

Who wants to kill a billionaire?

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: BETHESDA Developer: SPLASH DAMAGE Multiplayer: YES
Release Date: SPRING 2010 For Fans Of: *Quake Wars*, multiplayer action in single-player mode



► Everything in life should have a SMART-button option.

► The English say "gobsmacked." We say "jaw-dropping." These graphics are both.

Global warming. Rising oceans. Greedy, rich dudes sucking up resources. Cities falling into disrepair and societies splintering into warring factions. Man, the future sure is forecasted to suck — but somehow *Brink* makes all that human depravity and despair look downright lovely with its subtle comic-book looks and bright, colorful palette.

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— Francesca Reyes



► Character customization promises to be full-tilt, with loads of choice.

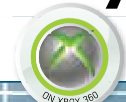


► Security or resistance? Take your pick.

HOW MUCH???: Rumors abound that James Cameron's *Avatar* film is the most expensive movie ever made, reportedly costing over $300 million.

NOT THAT *BRINK*: Who knew that back in 1998, the Disney Channel had their own version of *Brink* in the form of a made-for-TV movie focused on "casual inline skating" youth?

Warriors: Legends of Troy



Currently launching a thousand ships

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: KOEI Developer: KOEI CANADA Multiplayer: YES
Release Date: JUNE 2010 For Fans Of: *God of War*, *Dynasty Warriors*, Greco-Roman history

Some days, you really just want to kick some mythical-creature ass. *Legends of Troy* may be from the publisher famous for outputting new *Dynasty Warriors* games like clockwork, but don't expect this new Greco-Roman–era ode to smacking around gods and legendary heavyweights like Achilles to simply be a re-skin in gladiator sandals. Instead, consider this tactical actioner to be truer to *God of War* than just another mass-scale beat-'em-up.

Pitting famous figures from classical history in non-linear heroic journeys against opposing armies also gives way to one-on-one duels and an emphasis on exploration. You'll be able to take up arms for either the Greek or Roman side of the Trojan War in an attempt to either capture the beautiful Helen or resist the Greek invasion. Developer Koei Canada's brave step toward revitalizing the *Warriors* franchise certainly has a great premise in its corner, and we'd like to see for ourselves if Helen was really worth all that bloody trouble.

— Francesca Reyes



► Concept art shows off some pretty heady ideas for *Legends of Troy*.

Pirates of the Caribbean: Armada of the Damned

ON XBOX 360

Yo ho, yo ho, a good pirate game for me?

Platform: XBOX 360 Pub: DISNEY INTERACTIVE Dev: PROPAGANDA Multiplayer: TBA
Release: Q4 2010 For Fans Of: Undead pirates, high possibility of wenches



► Early shots smack of some seriously epic appeal.

After learning the first details about the upcoming *Pirates of the Caribbean* action-RPG, we began wondering how it took so long to get to this point. A freakin' open-seas pirate RPG? That's like peanut butter and chocolate together for the first time!

Taking place 15 years before the film trilogy's events, *Armada of the Damned* is a sandbox-style RPG world still fogged up by vague details (it's over a year away), but the team is eager to point out that your ship and crew are both gameplay tent poles you'll be able to customize, assemble, and grow to care about. After all, those battles at sea can't be fought alone or in a dinghy. But further tempting little morsels of info regarding the inclusion of the dreaded moonlight curse (zombie pirates ahoy!) as well as a multiple-choice, branching dialogue feature that affects how the world reacts to you have us eyeing this game very closely for its enormous potential.

— Francesca Reyes

Dirt 2

ON XBOX 360 HANDS-ON

Let it slide!

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: CODEMASTERS Developer: CODEMASTERS Multiplayer: YES
Release Date: SEPTEMBER 2009 For Fans Of: Off-road racing



► Every single mode is now playable on Live in eight-player action, and there's also team racing, where you can square off in two or four groups.

Getting the chance to play the sequel to our favorite off-road racing game counts as a good day, and our first session behind the wheel of *Dirt 2* didn't disappoint. Beyond the expected visual bump, the change that jumped out was the far more accessible handling. Sliding, for example, is much easier to manage.

Structure is the game's other big change. When you turn it on, you wake up in an RV that acts as the hub for your career, transporting you to all the race locations. Travis Pastrana is there to greet you, and he gives you Colin McRae's famous blue Subaru and tells you to do McRae proud*. Later on, Dave Mirra invites you to events in Baja, and so on — it's a much richer experience than just a pyramid of events. Better yet, you can stick with Subaru the whole game if you want to, upgrading its performance as you go. Or you can build the usual garage — your call.

— Paul Curthoys



► If you drive like an #$%$# in multiplayer, your car will automatically be turned into a ghost vehicle that can't collide with anyone else.

*SAD DAY: Colin McRae died in a helicopter crash in September 2007. The first *Dirt* had already released by then, so this is Codies' first chance to honor his legacy in a game.

Def Jam Rapstar

Calling all microphone fiends

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: 4MM GAMES/DEF JAM INTERACTIVE Developer: 4MM GAMES/TERMINAL REALITY Multiplayer: YES Release Date: WINTER 2009 For Fans Of: Hip-hop, karaoke

Watching friends drop rhymes to Kanye West's "Gold Digger" in a duet-style MC battle in the newly announced *Def Jam Rapstar* proves one thing (besides the fact that maybe your friends suck at rap): The game's "grab the mic" energy is crazy infectious.

Featuring everything from T.I.'s Rihanna-speckled "Live Your Life" to Notorious B.I.G's "Hypnotize," *Def Jam Rapstar* certainly aims to make good on its promise to cater to an underserved hip-hop–loving audience. Its *Lips*-style take on the genre is no joke, giving these tracks all the flair they deserve.

Flashy menu screens let you pick your poison. Want to battle it out with a friend for high-scores by swapping rhyme duty throughout a Flo-Rida track? Can do. You'll be judged on qualities like beats, notes, and words. And the inclusion of "words" as a category means that you can't go all *Rock Band* by simply yelling nonsense into the microphone — *Def Jam Rapstar* has a word-recognition system to keep you honest.

Or do you want to live the dream with incredibly deep community options? 4mm has plans to go all-out with Vision-camera support to help you record your performance, then select the best 30-second clip to upload to the game's website for all to see — and vote on. You'll be able to tweak the video settings to include cool bits like stage lights or a beach scene.

Though the radio-friendly edits of the included tunes might discourage those wanting a grittier hip-hop sing-along, the full songlist hasn't been revealed and a career mode has yet to be announced. But from the brief time we had with it, *DJR*'s heart feels squarely in place.

— Francesca Reyes



Prepare to battle it out to earn hip-hop cred. The game judges your performance in a handful of categories.

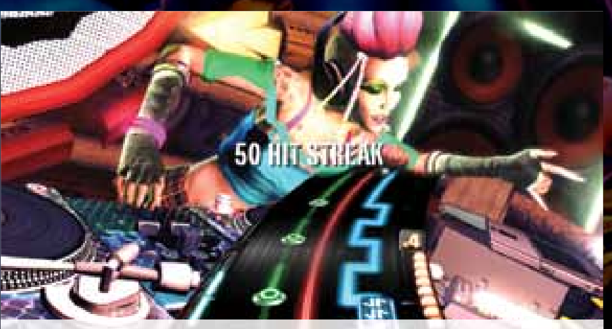


Think you have what it takes to post your video to the web?

DJ Hero

Worth a spin

Platform: XBOX 360 Pub: ACTIVISION/RED OCTANE Dev: FREESTYLE GAMES Multiplayer: YES Release: OCTOBER 2009 For Fans Of: Music games...with a twist



You'll also be able to plug in a mic. It won't affect gameplay; it just lets you MC the party through your TV speakers.

After our second session with *DJ Hero*, we're even more convinced that we've found our next music-game addiction. Maybe it's just gadget fetish....because operating the sweet turntable controller looks that incredibly fun. But we also really dig how open the game is. Developer FreeStyle has structured it so that all 100 tracks and 80 mixes by its in-house DJ team are available right from the start. Likewise, the career mode doesn't force you down a certain path — if you're not a hip-hop fan, you can stick to electronica, pop, R&B, or whatever else grabs you out of an artist lineup featuring everyone from 50 Cent to Nirvana, Blondie, KRS-1, and N.E.R.D.

And if you're intimidated by the prospect of mixing two records with samples and effects (like we were!), you'll be glad to hear that the game offers five difficulty levels, tucking a Beginner option underneath the usual Easy-to-Expert foursome. Those levels will introduce things to you gradually enough that you'll be able to get your legs under you before tackling the frantic note streams shown in the screens here. It really is different enough from *Guitar Hero* that you'll need the learning time, which is half the charm, really. Who among us isn't ready for a little change of pace after countless hours of rocking plastic guitars and drums?

The only barrier might be price. At press time, various retailers were listing the game and turntable as a $120 package — a figure Activision wouldn't confirm but we suspect to be true given the high build quality of the turntable we saw. So will *DJ Hero* be two games' worth of fun? We sure think — and hope — so.

— Paul Curthoys



Look Ma, no han...sorry about that.

Brink

Who wants to kill a billionaire?



Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: BETHESDA Developer: SPLASH DAMAGE Multiplayer: YES Release Date: SPRING 2010 For Fans Of: *Quake Wars*, multiplayer action in single-player mode



Everything in life should have a SMART-button option.

Global warming. Rising oceans. Greedy, rich dudes sucking up resources. Cities falling into disrepair and societies splintering into warring factions. Man, the future sure is forecasted to suck — but somehow *Brink* makes all that human depravity and despair look downright lovely with its subtle comic-book looks and bright, colorful palette.

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— Francesca Reyes

The English say "gobsmacked." We say "jaw-dropping." These graphics are both.



Character customization promises to be full-tilt, with loads of choice.



Security or resistance? Take your pick.

PEDIGREE CHECK: Jamie King, the president of 4MM Games, is credited as a founder and former VP at Rockstar Games and a former VP of development at Take-Two Interactive.

NOT THAT *BRINK*: Who knew that back in 1998, the Disney Channel had their own version of *Brink* in the form of a made-for-TV movie focused on "casual inline skating" youth?

Insert Coin

XBOX LIVE ARCADE — ON XBOX LIVE ARCADE

A look at tomorrow's Live Arcade Wednesdays…today!

PERFECT DARK

Publisher: MICROSOFT
Developer: 4J STUDIOS/RARE
Multiplayer: YES Release Date: WINTER 2009
For Fans Of: *GoldenEye*, *Perfect Dark Zero*, Nintendo 64

ON THE CABINET: Fanboy dreams do come true!
OUR 25¢: It's time to get over it: Because of legal red tape (i.e., too many rights-holders to please), an Xbox Live Arcade port of *GoldenEye* is never, ever going to happen. It was underway and got killed. We'll just have to accept the none-too-shabby consolation prize: a hot-rod remake of Rare's *GoldenEye* follow-up, *Perfect Dark*.

The legwork will be handled by 4J Studios — the same folks responsible for the recent *Banjo-Kazooie* XBLA update — but they'll be going the extra mile this time around by not only adding the expected online multiplayer, but also pumping up the resolution to 1080p. And so as not to disrespect the game's Nintendo 64 roots, four-player split-screen play on the same console will be available, too. The popular pre-*Halo* console shooter should control better than ever thanks to the Xbox 360's dual-stick gamepad. But will the gameplay hold up?

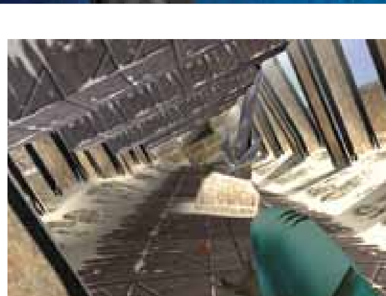
— Ryan McCaffrey

HYPE LEVEL:   

▶ 1080p? Online multiplayer? Make it 800 Points ($10) and it'll be a steal!



▶ Don't expect *BioShock*-level visuals, but the textures will be upgraded.



▶ The N64 original got nearly perfect review scores in 2000 (Metacritic average: 97%).

PROJECT CUBE

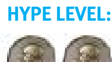
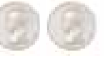
Publisher: SQUARE ENIX Developer: GULTI Multiplayer: YES
Release Date: TBD 2009 For Fans Of: *Geometry Wars*, boxes

ON THE CABINET: Outside the box
OUR 25¢: Controlling your rootin'-tootin', laser-firing, cube-killing robot (with the thumbsticks, à la *Geometry Wars* or *Robotron*) opens up a few other options: the ability to dash and a timed shield-type magnet.

Dash into a crowd of cube-shaped enemies to confuse them and little question marks pop up to indicate they're stunned. Now's your chance to take them out with one shot! With some bad guys, you'll need to dash into them to destroy them, as your lasers are rendered powerless against certain enemy types.

Simple, yes, but the result is the tough-as-nails type of experience we've come to love in a lot of the shooters on Xbox Live Arcade.

— Francesca Reyes

HYPE LEVEL:  



▶ Leveling up and collecting power-ups enables — what else? — crazy-ass new abilities for your cube-splattering pleasure.

SERIOUS SAM HD

Publisher: MAJESCO Developer: CROTEAM Multiplayer: YES
Release Date: SEPTEMBER 2009 For Fans Of: *Doom*, *Painkiller*, twitch shooters

ON THE CABINET: Why so serious?
OUR 25¢: We're not about to sit here and groan about the Xbox 360's glut of $20-million-budget, triple-A, thinking-man's shooters. But even though the fast-action, monster-closet, twitch first-person shooters of years past have become the exception rather than the rule, it's still nice to zone out every now and again and just shoot anything that moves. No story, no thinking, no problem.

Serious Sam HD's co-op–enabled Xbox Live Arcade debut should provide a nice break from the *BioShocks* and *Halos* of the world, letting us focus on fragging hordes of headless bomb-toting bad guys with friends. The auto-aim in our early build was a bit too generous, but it can be turned off. Just like our brains.

— Ryan McCaffrey

HYPE LEVEL:  



▶ Your relentless enemies don't exactly come bearing gifts.

TRIALS HD

Publisher: MICROSOFT Developer: RED LYNX
Multiplayer: NO Release Date: SUMMER 2009
For Fans Of: Racing games, stunts, action sports



▶ We can't imagine that fire goes well with combustible objects like a gas tank.

ON THE CABINET: Through the fire and flames
OUR 25¢: No head-to-head mode in a motorcycle-racing game filled with stunts, tricks, and twisty-turny customizable courses? That's heresy!

Well, not really, if you consider this XBLA up-and-comer's super-speedy strengths. To wit: Your goal isn't just to go fast — it's to go fast and survive the stuntman-like obstacles placed in your path. So, flipping over flaming hurdles is just par for the game's course, so to speak. In many ways, *Trials HD* combines the thrills of 2D-plane-with-3D-looks stunts with an almost side-scrolling platformer appeal and the need for speed of traditional racers in one package.

Add to this platforming-like approach the ability to craft your own levels to share over Xbox Live, and you have an experience that might not need any multiplayer modes in the end. We hope.

— Francesca Reyes

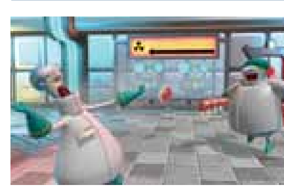
HYPE LEVEL:



▶ Ramps, jumps, and flips? Do 'em all.

SPLOSION MAN

Publisher: TWISTED PIXEL Developer: TWISTED PIXEL
Multiplayer: YES Release Date: SUMMER 2009
For Fans Of: *The Maw*, co-op, 'splosions but not explosions



ON THE CABINET: Meet the new hotness
OUR 25¢: Good art direction and cute character design can go a long way toward winning us over, especially for a well-traveled, dusty ol' genre like platforming. And *Splosion Man* offers both of these benefits coupled with an intriguing premise: As Splosion Man — a lab test subject who can explode himself at will — you must escape from your creators' clutches.

Raising our hype to the next level is *Splosion Man*'s pedigree: The game is being crafted by Twisted Pixel, the same folks responsible for the charming action-adventurer *The Maw*. And though we're still waiting for Maw plush dolls, we'll forgive them since *Splosion Man* comes with 50 single-player and co-op levels spread across three visually unique chapters.

Better still? Twisted Pixel promises a premium Dashboard theme and gamer pics as unlockable rewards, just as they delivered in *The Maw*. And they've even mentioned Avatar Awardables. Sold!

— Ryan McCaffrey

HYPE LEVEL:



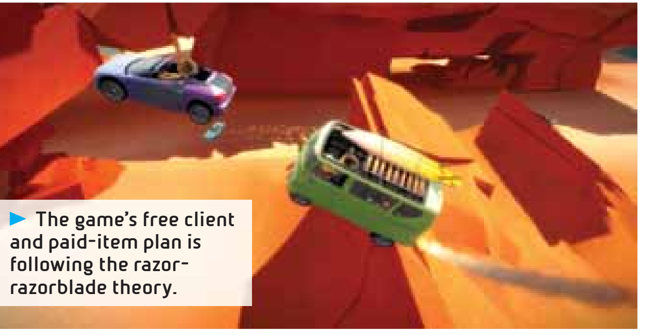
▶ Just because he's a walking third-degree burn doesn't mean Splosion Man can't be cute.



▶ 'Splode yourself at will to navigate your way around the game's 50 levels.

JOY RIDE

Publisher: MICROSOFT Developer: BIG PARK
Multiplayer: YES Release Date: TBD
For Fans Of: Arena driving, the Xbox community



▶ The game's free client and paid-item plan is following the razor-razorblade theory.

ON THE CABINET: Free for all
OUR 25¢: Spend five minutes on Live and it's obvious that teamwork isn't always a given in random online gaming matches. But the community-based, free-to-play, online-driving *Joy Ride* asks us to put aside our rage-quitting, player-killing urges and work together for the common good of completing objectives.

Friends and strangers alike can help you dash through the massive Stunt Park in the guise of your own personalized Avatar to unlock new goodies that reward a job well done. And *Joy Ride* is absolutely free to download for anyone on Live — Silver or Gold tier.

But if you want to take part in the bigger multiplayer bouts above and beyond 1- to 2-player (co-op or versus) offline, you'll need a Gold membership and will have to open your wallet for new tracks, game modes, and Avatar items. Luckily, one person can purchase a track or mode and share it with their buddies online — and that's got us mighty intrigued.

— Francesca Reyes


HYPE LEVEL:    

MORE BIG PARK: The newest Microsoft developer is based out of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, and was co-founded by current Xbox boss Don Mattrick.

JOY RIDE? WE BOUGHT THIS CAR!: Microsoft acquired developer Big Park in May for an undisclosed sum. Many of their employees had worked on *SSX* and other EA titles.

Guitar Hero 5







Jukebox meets sandbox

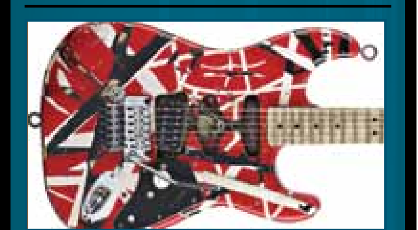
Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: ACTIVISION Developer: NEVERSOFT Multiplayer: YES
Release Date: SEPTEMBER 1, 2009 For Fans Of: *Rock Band 2*; freedom of choice


▶ Ladies and gentlemen: Fran, Ryan, Dan, and Paul — The Fabulous Avatars!


▶ Drums finally come center-stage...and fill all four spots if you want them to!


▶ Fresh new animations make everyone move more fluidly on stage.

What About Van Halen?



In addition to *Guitar Hero 5*, Activision is prepping three more games for release by the end of the year: the Top 40, family-friendly *Band Hero*; the remix-and-match stylings of *DJ Hero*; and, oh yeah, that long-rumored game starring '80s metal legends Van Halen. It's built on the same enhanced *GHWT* codebase that powered *GH: Metallica*, so picture rendered versions of Eddie and Dave instead of Kirk and James. The band's tracklist will draw from their late '70s/early '80s heyday — it's like Sammy Hagar never existed — and the "special guest" artists include Weezer, Blink-182, and other guys who grew up listening to *1984*. Activision wouldn't confirm a date (or even a developer), but the cradle will rock by year's end.

DIY 2.0

In *World Tour*, just giving gamers the ability to create and share their own playable tracks was a neat trick. For *GH5*, the GHStudio tools have been refined with dramatically simplified interfaces (each neck button handles a key function in GHMix, and the menu cascades down logically). New instrument samples and upgraded effects make the guitars sound much more natural, as do a whole new series of "expressions" — slides, bends, and divebombs, adjustable with the touchpad, give the user-created tracks a less synthetic sound. Or, you can embrace the inherent digitalness and create awesome chiptune jams. Whatever you make can be still shared for free: composers can now upload 50 homemade songs, each up to 10 minutes long.

Hey look – Avatars! Using your digital Dashboard doppelganger on stage in *Guitar Hero 5* is just one of several nice surprises we discovered when we spent a day with the franchise's latest iteration at Neversoft, but it's easily one of the sweetest.

"We've been working on this for a while," says project director Brian Bright with a smile. "We sent Microsoft screenshots three months ago, and their team didn't even know we were doing it. Their Avatar team freaked out." We did, too — seeing bulbous-headed Avatars bringing the rock with realistic, licensed instruments in their toony hands was part silly, part awesome. Either way, the end result elicits a big smile. As you build your band, you can mix and match them with the franchise's famous characters or create your own rocker. New character models and fresh mo-cap make *GH5*'s native graphics look dramatically smoother than the Chuck E. Cheese animatronics of *Guitar Hero III* and *Guitar Hero World Tour*.

> Career mode looks uncluttered and much more enjoyable than *World Tour's*.

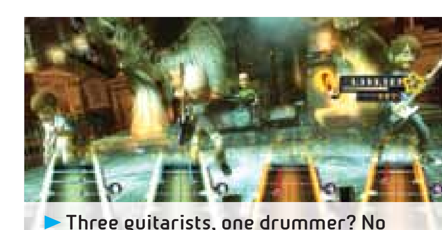
Mixing humans and Avatars is the most visual and obvious representation of *Guitar Hero 5*'s new spirit: More than any other game in the series, this one's about playing the way you want to play. The game's attract mode shows a band on stage playing one of *GH5*'s 85 songs. Pressing the Yellow button lets you play right then and there — a note highway opens up, you choose your instrument and difficulty, and then you jump into the song in progress.

The note highways just keep popping up on the right side of the screen any time your friends jump into the game; every player has their own menu, and using it doesn't stop the music, even if it pauses their personal part of it. And anybody can play whatever instrument they want, even if it's already taken; nobody has to sing. That's Party Play.

It might not sound like a very dramatic change, but after trying it, we think it has the potential to completely change the dynamic of game nights — from ringing phones to empty beers, everyone can come and go as they please, and any player can immediately veto and skip the current track in the setlist. We swapped between guitar and bass tracks and tried different difficulties without interrupting our drummer's multiplier streak. Party Play streams up to 125 of the songs on your hard drive, either from your planned playlists or randomly mixing in the disc's songs with whatever *World Tour* DLC may be on your hard drive. The beat just goes on and on.

The instant-on, welcoming vibe of Party Play is a warm, fuzzy break from *GH*'s continued on pg. 46 ▶▶


▶ Ryan gives a good solo face while rocking the Tony Montana suit.


▶ Three guitarists, one drummer? No problem. Play *GH5* your way.


▶ Old friends like Johnny Napalm return.

GEAR: The guitar controller has been subtly improved with a digital touchpad and a tweaked strum bar with a Les Paul feel. The new guitars feature chrome accents on the headstock.

TAPPING KNOWLEDGE: Some leaked *Guitar Hero: Van Halen* Achievements suggest that "Little Guitars," "Cathedral," "Eruption," and "Spanish Fly" are among the tracks.

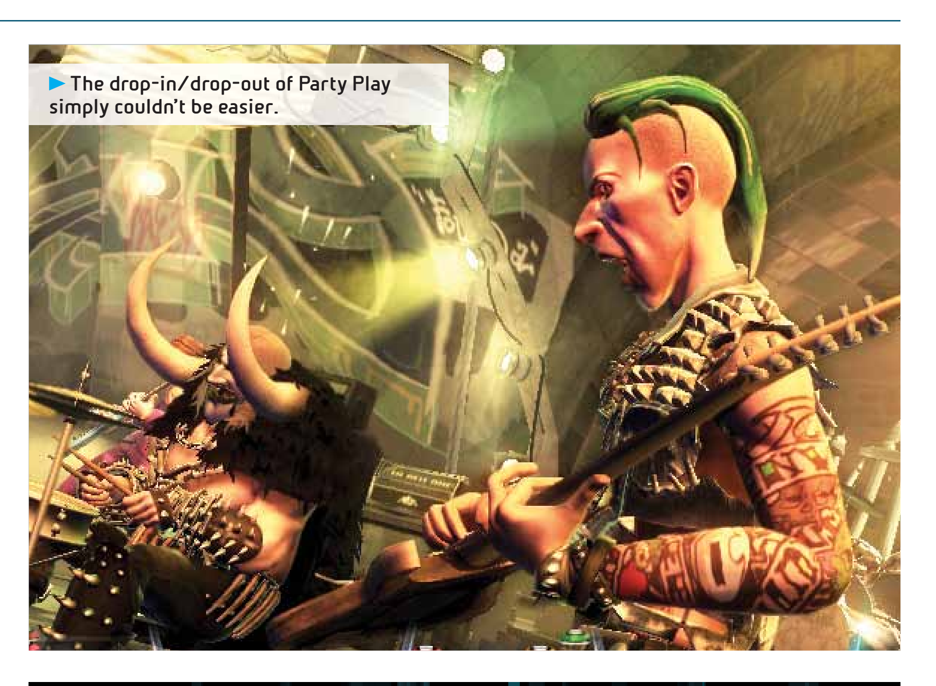
Guitar Hero 5 continued

traditional competitive focus. “Every time we see a kid in the *Guinness Book of World Records* playing Dragonforce, it’s cool,” says Bright. “We still want to have that element of difficulty and competitiveness — but we don’t necessarily want that element in the face of someone who just wants to have a good time.” For the shredders, there are plenty of multiplayer competitions here for soloists and teams, online and off. Armed with any instrument on any skill level, you can face off in streak competitions, knockout runs, and score races — and mix them up in a custom-made gauntlet called RockFest. The contests we saw felt fair; it’s simply more fun to win with skill than to try to cause your friends to fail.

Eventually we stopped to check out Career mode, which departs from last year’s rigid setlist structure and follows an approach similar to *GH Metallica* and *Smash Hits*. First, it’s unified — no more single/band career paths. And there’s no huge story: every gig is simply worth stars. If you can pull off a special goal — a point threshold, or a note streak, or some other performance-based milestone — then you get extra stars and an unlockable goodie, such as an outfit or instrument. Stars open new venues, and venues lead you to the career’s conclusion. It’s uncluttered and looks much more enjoyable than *World Tour*’s...um, world tour.

We’ve been worried that Activision might be burning out *Guitar Hero* by releasing so many music games in one year, but we came away from *Guitar Hero 5* considering an unexpected benefit: Maybe a franchise constantly in motion has less to prove with each annual release. This year, *Guitar Hero*’s main innovation looks to be more social, simple fun.

— Dan Amrich



The drop-in/drop-out of Party Play simply couldn’t be easier.



Will *GH5* feature clothing Awardables? They won’t say.

PRETTY DAMN COOL: In the Rock Fest competitive multiplayer arena, the Momentum mode adjusts difficulty on the fly. Nail 20 notes in a row and you’ll move up one notch (say, from Hard to Expert). Miss three consecutive notes, however, and you’ll drop a difficulty level mid-song.

Youth Gone Wild

“This year we really wanted every single song to be fun to play on guitar,” says Bright. “Even if it was by a band you hadn’t heard before, it would be a band you’d want to know about because the song was good.” While several classic acts are in the mix, *Guitar Hero 5* features a ton of current and just-now-breaking bands. If you think the oldies are moldy, check out this partial confirmed list of freshness, and know that more cutting-edge acts are TBA:

SONG TITLE	ARTIST
“Judith”	A Perfect Circle
“Brianstorm”	Arctic Monkeys
“You And Me”	Attack! Attack! UK
“The Rock Show”	Blink-182
“All Along The Watchtower”	Bob Dylan
“Done With Everything, Die For Nothing”	Children Of Bodom
“Saturday Night’s Alright (For Fighting)”	Elton John
“Disconnected”	Face To Face
“2 Minutes To Midnight”	Iron Maiden
“Ring Of Fire”	Johnny Cash
“Sex On Fire”	Kings Of Leon
“Mirror People”	Love and Rockets
“No One To Depend On (Live)”	Santana
“Superstition”	Stevie Wonder
“Send A Little Love Token”	The Duke Spirit
“All The Pretty Faces”	The Killers
“Sympathy For The Devil”	The Rolling Stones
“Blue Orchid”	The White Stripes
“Deadbolt”	Thrice
“Runnin’ Down A Dream”	Tom Petty
“Wolf Like Me”	TV On The Radio
“A-Punk”	Vampire Weekend
“Back Round”	Wolfmother

VOCAL MINORITY: Brian Bright promises that *GH5* will still deliver finger-twisters. “Less than 10 percent of people completed the career on Expert...but 10 percent of a few million is [a lot].”

JUST ANNOUNCED!

FIRST LOOK!

Loads of new Xbox 360 games were unveiled at the recent E3 trade show, but some announcements included just a few morsels of information. Of those games, here’s a quick rundown of the ones we’re most excited about and what we know so far.

ONE THING WE DO KNOW: *Metal Gear Solid: Rising* will not be using the same graphics engine that powered the PS3’s *Metal Gear Solid 4*. Our bet is on either Unreal Engine or a different proprietary tech.



METAL GEAR SOLID: RISING

Publisher: KONAMI
Developer: KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS
Multiplayer: TBA
Release Date: TBA

All those rumors about Xbox 360 getting a redux of 2008’s *Metal Gear Solid 4* were met with an even grander announcement: Kojima Productions is producing a brand-new *Metal Gear* for our favorite system, and it’ll star Raiden, the fair-haired sword-slinging boy who caused big waves by taking over for series lead Solid Snake during *MGS2*. Story, plot, gameplay details? Still TBA, but we can’t deny our interest isn’t completely rapt by Raiden’s cyborg looks.

CRACKDOWN 2

Publisher: MICROSOFT Developer: RUFFHOUSE GAMES Multiplayer: TBA Release Date: TBA

The crowds at Microsoft’s E3 press conference broke out in cheers once audience members realized that a sequel to 2007’s wicked free-roamer is on its way. New developer Ruffian is literally down the street from Realtime Worlds and is composed of RTW expatriates, so this follow-up is in good hands. The brief footage we’ve seen hints at a monstrous turn in an even darker future. And four-player co-op is confirmed!



Crackdown 2 is in good hands.

CRYSIS 2

Publisher: EA Developer: CRYTEK
Multiplayer: TBA Release Date: TBA

The tech-splosive release of the original *Crysis* on PC set the gaming world on fire when it pushed the required system specs of gaming rigs to their limits. But this time around, the shooter’s sequel is no longer relegated to PCs. Hello, Xbox 360!

CASTLEVANIA: LORDS OF SHADOW

Publisher: KONAMI Developer: MERCURY STEAM/ KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS Multiplayer: TBA
Release Date: 2010

We may all remember the vampire-slaying series as an experience best suited to 2D — proven wholly by Live Arcade’s *Symphony of the Night* — but Konami has other plans with *Lords of Shadow*, a fully-3D spin on a franchise rich with dark fantasy and ghoulishly tough action. The title’s European team (also responsible for *Clive Barker’s Jericho*) has paired up with Kojima Productions to hopefully kick the beloved series successfully into the next dimension. We’re ready to believe.

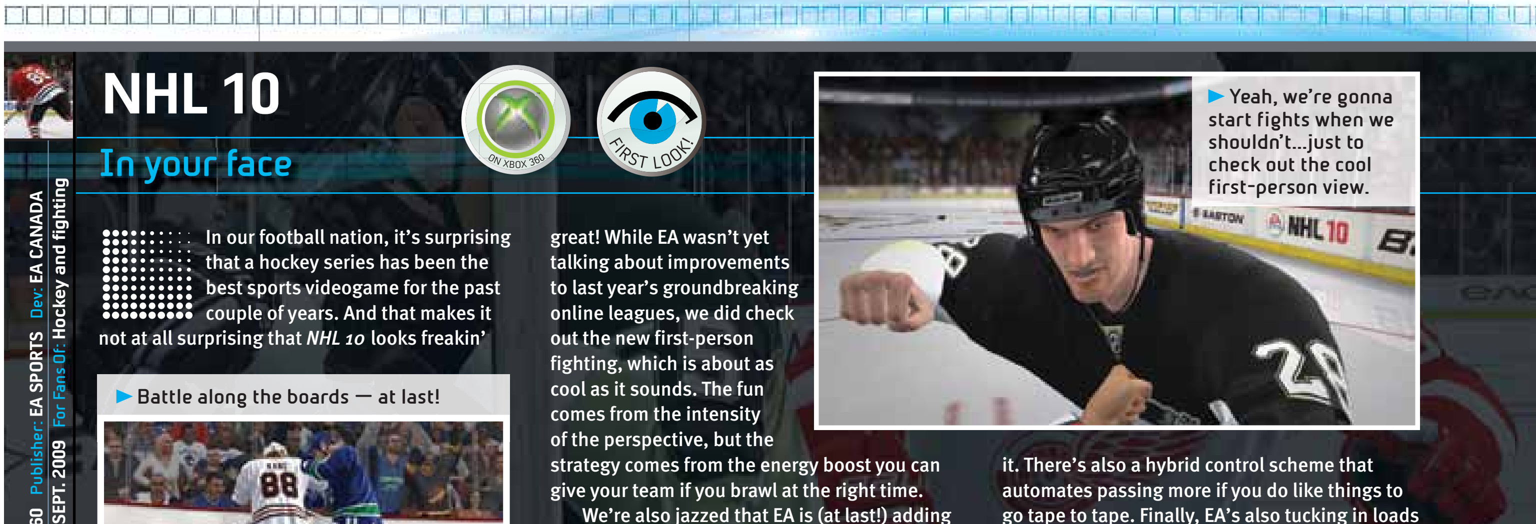


Castlevania’s about to get interesting again.

EA SPORTS MMA

Publisher: EA SPORTS Developer: TBA
Multiplayer: TBA Release Date: 2010

The announcement of a new challenger to THQ’s mixed-martial-arts gem *UFC 2009 Undisputed* will hopefully prove the old adage “competition breeds innovation.” EA’s run at the octagon may not net it the UFC license (THQ holds that license for games), but with the brawl-sport’s massive popularity, they’ll have plenty of other leagues to choose from, including World Extreme Cagefighting (WEC).



NHL 10

In your face

ON XBOX 360 · FIRST LOOK!

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: EA SPORTS Dev: EA CANADA
MP: YES Release: SEPT. 2009 For Fans Of: Hockey and fighting

In our football nation, it’s surprising that a hockey series has been the best sports videogame for the past couple of years. And that makes it not at all surprising that *NHL 10* looks freakin’ great! While EA wasn’t yet talking about improvements to last year’s groundbreaking online leagues, we did check out the new first-person fighting, which is about as cool as it sounds. The fun comes from the intensity of the perspective, but the strategy comes from the energy boost you can give your team if you brawl at the right time.

We’re also jazzed that EA is (at last!) adding play along the boards. That means the D can pin the puck and try to kick it clear while the offense tries to cycle it. A new “precision” passing-control option gives you full control over the direction and speed of a pass — if you want it. There’s also a hybrid control scheme that automates passing more if you do like things to go tape to tape. Finally, EA’s also tucking in loads of little improvements, such as more aggressive A.I., one-timers that work better, and clean-up of known goalie exploits. Sounds like the beginning of another great season...

— Paul Curthoys

Battle along the boards — at last!

Yeah, we’re gonna start fights when we shouldn’t...just to check out the cool first-person view.

HOCKEY HISTORY: June’s Pittsburgh Penguins’ Game 7 Cup victory over the Detroit Red Wings at the Joe Louis Arena was the first time a road team had won Game 7 in *any* sport since 1979.



WELCOME TO THE FUNHOUSE

Andrew Ryan built the happiest place on Earth...and even its kiddie rides have a hidden agenda. Don't miss this world-exclusive peek at a new in-game mission from *BioShock 2*, where iconoclast Ryan himself wants to mold your mind...

Game: **BIOSHOCK 2**
Publisher: **2K GAMES**
Developer: **2K MARIN (single-player)/ DIGITAL EXTREMES (multiplayer)**
Multiplayer: **YES**
ESRB: **MATURE**
Release Date: **NOVEMBER 3, 2009**

words: CORBY COHEN



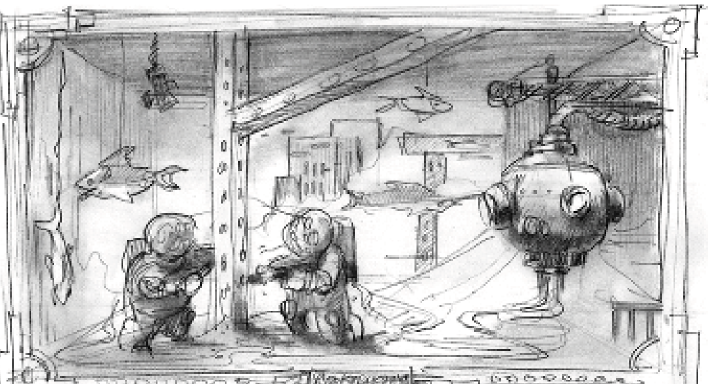
"What? Andrew Ryan is in *BioShock 2*?!" If that's how you reacted to the previous paragraph, then you know just how we felt hearing his voice in a recent demo of the upcoming sequel. Truth be told, the entrepreneur is not alive and well in *BioShock 2*: he's still dead. But such is his presence, his power — and the impact of his death in the first game — that almost any *BioShock* fan will be a bit stunned to hear his recorded speech in this portion of the game.

"My name is Andrew Ryan. I built the city of Rapture for children just like you, because the world above had become unfit..." he intones. The place is Ryan Amusements, a theme park designed to show young children how scary the surface world is, and convince them never to leave their underwater home. The year is 1968 — nearly a decade after the events of the original *BioShock*. And you're a Big Daddy — the very first one, as it turns out. For more details on where you are and what you're doing, read on...

BEFORE THE NOW

Before embarking on our demo of the Ryan Amusements level, which is about two hours into the game, 2K Marin creative director Jordan Thomas offers some more background info on the single-player campaign — with prominent gaps to avoid spoilers. Unlike *BioShock*'s hero, Jack, who arrived in Rapture as a stranger with no idea he was related to it in any way, your character in *BioShock 2* is an important part of Rapture's history. "You're a living example of how good ideas went bad, and of how a city founded to exalt personal liberty ended up building slaves," explains Thomas.

continued on pg. 50



INSPIRATIONS: For Thomas and team, they include *Fallout 3*, *System Shock*, and "games like *Hitman* that offer a wide space for players to try different tools and tactics and make a plan."

CAUGHT YA: Vita-Chambers are back, but they won't be as exploitable now. Big Daddies and other foes will be able to regain health, so you can't use endless respawns to wear them down.



WELCOME TO THE FUNHOUSE


Elsewhere, these faces might be comforting. In Rapture, they're just plain creepy.




Upgrading weapons offers some slick options. Get the final attachment for this Rivet Gun, and your Rivets will build up heat on a target; with enough hits, the enemy will burst into flame.




Ten years later, Splicers are still wearing party masks...and gunning for your hide.

HACKJOB, THIS AIN'T

Remember the pipe-linking minigame you played to hack objects in *BioShock*? Haters will be happy to know, it's gone. For *BioShock 2*, the devs want to keep you on the main screen while you hack, so the new minigame is reminiscent of reloading a weapon in *Gears of War*: a needle scrolls left to right, and you time your button-press just right. Land in the small green zone, and you're successful; land in the teeny-tiny blue zone, and you also earn a bonus. Better yet, using a remote hacking tool, you can now hack cameras, safes, and such from a distance, leaving you less exposed while you work.

So the game's intro depicts your life in Rapture's pre-*BioShock* past. You were deployed as the first Big Daddy, you had a Little Sister with you, and *something* went wrong; now you've somehow awakened in 1968 wondering what the hell happened. Part of the story of *BioShock 2* will be finding out what occurred right before your memory lapse and why you ended up where you did. Early in the game, you'll encounter two familiar people: Augustus Sinclair (mentioned in one of the first game's diaries, and owner of Sinclair Spirits [*BioShock*] and Sinclair Solutions [see page 53]) and Dr. Bridgette Tenenbaum (who freed you from Fontaine's mental control in *BioShock*, and encouraged you to save the Little Sisters). They both agree to help you if you'll help them, and your first stop is Ryan Amusements, where you're currently trapped and need to find a new plasmid before you can move on.

DADDY HUNGRY

Key to getting that plasmid is acquiring Adam, and for that, you'll need to nab a Little Sister, who can sniff out Adam-filled corpses. As you enter the El Dorado restaurant, you find a Bouncer and his girlish companion, but you need to eliminate him so she'll bond with you.

What's the best way to beat a fellow Big Daddy? With careful planning and strategy, taking advantage of both your plasmids and your weapons. You might place a Cyclone Trap for him to step on, or, as 2K did in our demo, lay down a row of Trap Rivets; these proximity weapons shoot approaching enemies, and are special ammo for your Rivet Gun. In our demo, our Big Daddy machine-gunned the Bouncer to get his attention, threw a barrel at him with Telekinesis, and then sneakily lured him through the row of Trap Rivets. As in multiplayer (see page 53), the new ability to launch plasmid attacks and fire weapons at the same time makes combat easier and encourages combos like following up a sizzling electro bolt with a booming shotgun blast. Poor enemies.

Once her Daddy dies, you can adopt the Little Sister and she'll begin scouting Adam. Because you need lots of it, this mission poses several scenarios where you need to keep Splicers from snagging your Sister while she's harvesting a corpse. "These aren't escort quests where you're protecting her," Thomas emphasizes. "They're efficiency encounters where you're trying to keep Splicers from making it through your defenses and grabbing her, which will attract even more Splicers." So while you *could* play them run-and-gun–style — sticking to weapons like your drill for blood-spurting chainsaw attacks — you're best off rigging the environment as well: laying Trap Rivet fences, hacking turrets and health stations so they injure opponents, and so on.

AWFULLY RAND-Y

As you roam Ryan Amusements in search of Adam, you can't help but gawk at the surroundings. Naturally, they're gorgeous — in a rundown, defiled sort of way — with lots of fascinating details that radiate *BioShock*. Walking by a ruined rollercoaster, you hear Ryan's voice preaching Objectivist learnings to the young passengers...well, if there were any. Near another ride, a Splicer tries to crush you by rolling a Bathysphere down some steps; take him out, and you can take a moment to appreciate this attraction, where visitors once rode a rickety Bathysphere while listening to Ryan's rants about the government seizing their personal gains.

In any other game, all this lecturing might seem like high-brow nonsense, but with what we know of Ryan and Rapture, it's captivating. Displays with giant hands ("Government") blocking artists from their easels and pushing down bold scientists are an intriguing reminder of Ryan and cohorts' deeply held beliefs, and of just how much they loathed land-dwellers. Moreover, these elements are clearly grist for an overarching story. "In *BioShock 2*, there's a new character from the player's past who has very different ideas than Ryan — he's an old political rival," Thomas tells us. "The Splicers serve that character, and you'll see them defacing the rides, watching the beginning of those ideas taking over in this space. As you hear more and more of Ryan saying what he believes, this new character pipes in and points out that this is where everything went wrong — you, the Big Daddy, case in point." These comments were disabled in our demo — for now, 2K is keeping this new character firmly under wraps — but we're eager to learn more about him, and more important, to know if he's friend or foe.

TWISTED SISTERS

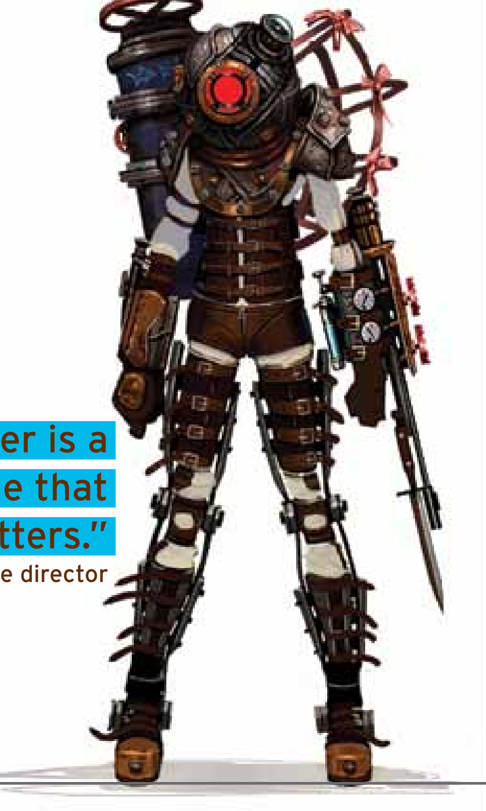
Ryan's recordings are engrossing, to be sure ("Armin Shimerman totally nailed them," beams Thomas, praising the returning actor). But as you near the end of the theme park, you'll have other things on your mind. Passing through an animatronic workshop — where you'll be oh-so-tempted to grab the dummies with Telekinesis and hurl them at Splicers — you reach a safety vent where you have a time-honored choice: harvest or save your Little Sister. Good folks that they are, our 2K hosts save her and move on to the House of the Future, which holds the plasmid you need...

...and some dynamic music kicks in. *Menacing* music. You've attracted the attention of the Big Sister, the former Little Sister who's returned to Rapture and is making new Little Sisters. Throughout the game, she's watching everything you do with the little Adam collectors, and the mystery of who she is dovetails with the mystery of who *you* are. Soon after you grab the plasmid, she appears — and she's not friendly. She's a fierce opponent, fast and agile, and as she leaps around nimbly and stabs at you with her giant Adam-harvesting needle, she can also throw fireballs and use other plasmid-powered attacks, and heal herself by extracting Adam from corpses.

> "The Big Sister is a human being inside that suit, and that matters."
> — Jordan Thomas, creative director

As Thomas tells it: "The Big Sister is a strongly connected story character. You always get a reward for beating her, but you can't suppress her permanently —

continued on pg. 52 ▶▶



DIARIES: Thomas told our UK pals that audio logs will return and that "radio play is super-important" to the story, but noted feedback about NPCs shying away when you met them...

DIARIES, PART 2: "We're going to make sure you have some strong and unforgettable encounters with unspliced characters that you can develop genuine empathy for," he says.

WELCOME TO THE FUNHOUSE



The devs are aiming for more enemy diversity this time, says McClendon. Sometimes, you'll juggle scores of weaker foes; in other areas, lone nemeses will pose a major threat.

In Ryan's mind, the Journey to the Surface is a straight shot to hell.

In multiplayer, meeting certain side objectives (e.g., melee-killing the guy who just killed you) will net you even more Adam.

"We have a lot of opportunities to mess with your head."
— Jordan Thomas, creative director

WHAT ELSE WILL WE SEE?

While we had the ear of creative director Jordan Thomas, we couldn't resist grilling him on other possibilities for this watery sequel. His patient responses:

JACK

Your character from the first *BioShock* had a satisfying story arc with closure — but when has that ever stopped a developer from bringing back a familiar face?

ODDS OF APPEARING: "Zero — his story is over from the point of *BioShock 2*," says Thomas without hesitation. "However, the odds of *references* to Jack are extremely favorable. We don't want to invalidate any choices the player made in the first game, so it's actually become the subject of debate in Rapture, in terms of what he did."

A GAME-ENDING BOSS BATTLE

It's a pretty universal opinion: the weakest part of *BioShock* was its formulaic final fight with a mutated Fontaine. Would 2K Marin dare repeat history?

ODDS OF APPEARING: "I don't want to spoil the end of the game," replies Thomas, in a tone that's utterly and purposely unreadable. "But I'll tell you this — you won't be fighting a giant statue again."

UNDERWATER COMBAT WITH A MUTATED SEA CREATURE

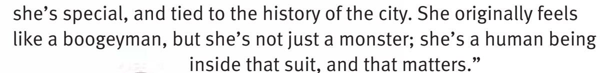
2K Marin has previously revealed that *BioShock 2* will allow your Big Daddy character to go outside Rapture and tour its underwater surroundings. Naturally, our twisted minds immediately considered what you could fight.

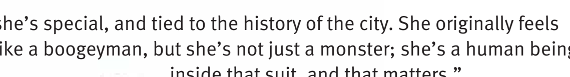
ODDS OF APPEARING: "We deliberately chose the underwater portions of the game as exploration space and breathing room. We wanted to give you the chance to recover diaries from peoples' flooded houses and peek in at spaces that are going to be hostile," Thomas explains. "So the odds are not good."

A LITTLE DADDY

Don't say you haven't wondered. As scary as it sounds, it's the only remaining combination of Little-Big-Sister-Daddy to exploit!

ODDS OF APPEARING: Thomas' laughter is reassuring. "It depends on your definition, actually," he adds. "The odds aren't zero, depending on what you'd call a Little Daddy." Let's hope he's joking.





she's special, and tied to the history of the city. She originally feels like a boogeyman, but she's not just a monster; she's a human being inside that suit, and that matters."

At the moment, that human is kicking our Big Daddy butt. But with some melee moves (like uppercutting with the drill) and skilled use of Incinerate and other plasmids and weapons, our hosts fend off the Big Sister, and she teleports away. We're safe...for now.

The demo ends there, and for a Big Daddy, we're feeling surprisingly vulnerable. Especially when we remember that we haven't seen any of the special, "alpha dog" Splicers yet — the ones who've been splicing for more than a decade, and who will, as lead designer Zak McClendon notes, "hopefully scare the crap out of you...and make you back up a bit when you see them coming."

That's a freaky thought, but Thomas puts it in context: "*Condemned*-style scares were not *BioShock*'s strength; it was more about loss and creepiness; about character-driven psychological horror. And in *BioShock 2*, with this man-stuck-inside a-monster, we have a lot of opportunities to mess with your head. We're exploiting those rather than trying to be *Condemned*....There will be a mechanical challenge with a great, kickass shooter along the way. But the scares come from moral context, and from the sense of vulnerability and sanity."

As gamers and *BioShock* fans, that's a message we can really believe in. ●

IT'S WAR



Straight from the multiplayer battlefield: a firsthand account of the fall of Rapture!

When we think *BioShock*, we think "alone." So it's hard to convey just how surreal it is to step into a game of *BioShock 2* multiplayer. For the first few minutes of actual play, you can barely believe that you're surrounded by other human beings. Of course, the fact that some or all of them want to kill you helps make it more familiar.

Before we describe our experience, though, let's pause to acknowledge the borderline-genius premise for the multiplayer game. Whereas *BioShock 2*'s single-player campaign takes place nearly a decade after the events of *BioShock* — long after Jack's adventures in Rapture — *BioShock 2* multiplayer is set a year *before* the first game, during the fall of Rapture. You're a product tester for Sinclair Solutions, trying out their "home-defense products" (i.e., plasmids and weapons) in the field. Idea-wise, it's double awesome: not only does it let *BioShock 2* be both prequel and sequel, but it also makes *sense*. The mayhem and infighting accompanying the city's collapse seem like the very essence of multiplayer combat.





The same story-oriented thinking clearly went into your apartment — the waiting area you're in before you actually walk into a Bathysphere to enter a multiplayer match. While here, you can check leaderboards, customize your character, and change your loadouts (of which you can have three, and switch between them at respawns). If story's not your thing, you can just jump into a match, but if it does interest you, you'll get messages from Sinclair as your character ranks up to level 20, each level offering a new bit of narrative.

To raise your rank — achieved by acquiring a certain level of Adam — you need to get in a game and play, which is where our hands-on actually began. We played as Jacob Norris, a welder; among the other five characters are a housewife, a football player, a pilot, and a businessman. Each character has a unique melee weapon, such as Jacob's wrench, the football player's trophy, and the housewife's — what else? — frying pan.

continued on pg. 54 ▶▶



To close the gap on far-away foes, use Aero Dash, a new plasmid that lets you leap across open areas.

LENGTH?: "We're still trying to hit a sweet spot with single-player," Thomas tells us. "I want it to be engaging right until the end, with a perfect balance between polish and narrative meaning."

WILL YOU LEAVE THE SUIT?: Thomas wouldn't say how the player may or may not change in the game; only that "our primary focus is to give you the experience of being a Big Daddy."

WELCOME TO THE FUNHOUSE IT'S WAR



Being the Big Daddy is a blast in multiplayer...but it's dangerous, too. Everyone wants the bounty of Adam for killing you.





Familiar spots like Fort Frolic (shown) and Point Prometheus have been retooled for multiplayer fun.



Character-specific weapons and verbal comments add some nice variety when you're in a full 10-person game.

And the matches themselves? Fast-paced and tense, whether you're in free-for-all or team-deathmatch mode. With *BioShock 2*'s new dual-wielding control scheme (left trigger fires a plasmid, right trigger fires a weapon), you can use a plasmid and a weapon simultaneously, allowing for the same devastating combos as single-player mode. Slow a guy down with Winter Blast, then waste him with a shotgun. Leap into him with Aero Dash (a plasmid unique to multiplayer), and then, while he's stunned, shoot him with your crossbow. Or do a triple combo: Geyser Trap to fling someone into a wall and get them wet; then Electro Bolt (which is amplified by the victim's temporary wet state); then a quick melee move to finish 'em off. With all this mix-and-matching, the gameplay feels a bit like *Shadowrun*, and that's a compliment.

Other factors make the action even more hectic, including hackable turrets and vending machines; environmental hazards (like oil slicks that magnify Incinerate flame); customizable plasmids and weapons; and finding Eve to keep your plasmids going. And let's not forget a Big Daddy suit that randomly appears! Nab it and you become an extra-tough Rosie-style Daddy, wielding proximity mines, a Big Daddy Stomp (to repel enemies trying to melee you), and a Rivet Gun. Despite limited vision and mobility, being a Big Daddy is good fun offensively; of course, it also puts a big target on your back, as killing you yields more Adam than any other kill or assist.

With so many elements, multiplayer gives you a lot to think about, but for anyone who's played either *BioShock*, the shared play mechanics make the human-on-human game fairly intuitive. And all the complexity certainly makes it feel *BioShock*-y. Judging by our hour-plus playtime on three maps, it seems like good, solid fun — not mind-blowing and not necessarily poised to overshadow the single-player game, but a definite bonus that game owners should enjoy.

A few wild cards could up the mind-blowingness, however. One is the third, as-yet-unrevealed multiplayer mode; 2K did confirm that it includes Little Sisters, which could make for a pretty entertaining game dynamic. Another is the narrative formed by Sinclair's messages, which we haven't seen but are *very* intrigued by. And finally, there's another story aspect — the details spread throughout the 10 multiplayer maps, all of which are repurposed locations from the original *BioShock*. Elements like the toilet stall on the Kashmir map (which contains usable explosives mentioned in *BioShock*; they caused the New Year's Eve explosion) make compelling content for fans of the first game, and could be a real treat if sufficiently fleshed out. Regardless of how these pieces pan out, though, we'll be ready to play product tester come November 3. ●

NO KILLS, NO PROBLEM: For pacifists, *BioShock 2* multiplayer offers other ways to rank up. You get it for hacking or repairing machines and turrets, too.

THE TOP 100 XBOX GAMES OF ALL TIME

Here we go! In honor of our 100th issue, welcome to our first-ever, best-ever list. After hours of deliberation based on years of gameplay, we based this list not on pure review scores but on the experiences these evolving games have given us. Lots of things were taken into account, including history, innovation, influence, and execution — but most importantly, we talked about fun, past and present. Keep that in mind as you sharpen your pencils and knives, then let us know your thoughts at *letters@officialxboxmagazine.com*. Enjoy!

BY THE OXM EDITORS



1 Halo: Combat Evolved

XBOX • 2001

We think we can hear your shock and outrage now. "Oh my god — their top game of all time is an original-Xbox game!" No — our top game of all time is *the* original-Xbox game.

Halo: Combat Evolved set the standard for quality, action, and execution on Microsoft's consoles; it defined Xbox gaming as we know it. Until the release of *Halo*, first-person shooters always felt clunky on consoles; Bungie proved they were absolutely at home here, and opened up the doors for the genre. The entire game was playable cooperatively in split-screen or via System Link; even before the advent of Xbox Live, 16-player matches were easily attained simply by gathering gamers and gear in the same room. ("Due to the time pressures of hitting Xbox launch, there was a period of time where multiplayer was on the chopping block," says designer Tyson Green. "Imagine that.") The story offered a rich, deep sci-fi universe with intelligent beings, devastating weaponry, great dialogue, and a sucker-punch plot twist that left everyone wondering who the real enemy was. What's more, it did it with impeccable execution. Like the review in our December 2001 issue said: "The hype didn't even do it justice."

On a larger, industry-wide scale, *Halo* gave gamers everywhere a compelling reason to buy an Xbox. For just a second, let's put aside everything that *Halo* delivered as a game and face one sobering fact: If not for the triumph of *Halo* in the face of the PS2's incredible success, the Xbox never would have survived. It's the reason we have *everything* else.

2 Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

XBOX 360 • 2007

Single-player or multiplayer — which part of *COD4* is better? Please don't ask us to answer that, because all of *COD4* was about excellent execution. While *Modern Warfare* followed the *COD* formula of telling its tale from multiple perspectives, it threw in narrative surprise and heroic moments that nobody saw coming in a sh... "I hate the term 'shooter' because a lot of gamers have preconceptions of what that means," says Robert Bowling, Infinity Ward's Community Manager. "With *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, it was our goal to break those preconceptions." After all those shifts in story, consider 'em smashed.

Multiplayer proved just as innovative with its leveling system (take a peek online — people are still playing now), and it went through a lot of experimentation — not to mention a pioneering public beta — to find its balance. "Before Killstreak Rewards were 'killstreak rewards,' we called them Hardpoints," recalls Bowling. "When they were first introduced, helicopter support, airstrike, and UAV were all obtained by securing a laptop, much like taking a domination point. The problem with that was it concentrated all the fighting around three areas of the map. We also experimented with driveable Humvees early on, but we quickly abandoned that, as it totally destroyed the high-speed infantry combat and map design we had going. Vehicles forced you to space out the buildings and open up the map in a lot of ways that hurt gameplay. The fun is in the fighting — not running to the fight for 10 minutes."

WE KNEW GAZ WHEN: *OXM*'s review of *Halo* was written by Gary Whitta. He's currently writing scripts for television shows and major motion pictures.

ABOVE AND BEYOND THE CALL: Did you enjoy the *COD4* public beta? Thank Infinity Ward's Robert Bowling: He sent beta keys to 800,000 community members — *manually*.



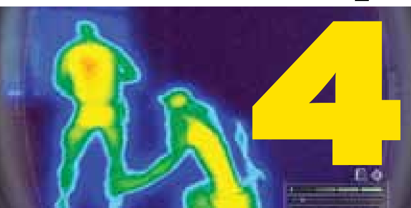
3 Mass Effect

XBOX 360 • 2008

When you get down to it, RPGs are about one thing: *story*. There is no more interesting, multi-layered, satisfying, and expertly told tale on Xbox than the sci-fi epic of *Mass Effect*. "We wanted to take what we had done with *KOTOR*...and take that into a new universe, where there's really no limits on what you could do as a character or what we could do in a story," said project director Casey Hudson in the *Making of Mass Effect* documentary.

What they did was unlock a galaxy of possibilities. Once we decided our Shepard's gender and backstory, side stories led us to beautiful alien planets and plenty of firefights with the deadly Geth, all delivered with jaw-dropping graphics. But the real heart of the game came down to how that innovative radial dialogue menu opened windows to very human issues: prejudice, politics, moral choices, and complex interpersonal relationships. And even more impressive, the game made you truly care about all of the above. For a game set in the coldness of space, *Mass Effect* was really all about emotion.

4 Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory



XBOX • 2005

"The original *Splinter Cell* was not even on the shelves yet, and guys from the dev team were already working on *Chaos Theory*," recalls producer Mathieu Ferland. "The co-op–mode concept had been thought out before the solo campaign." That groundbreaking implementation helped solidify *Chaos Theory*'s lofty position on this list — it was a perfect complement to Xbox Live's abilities beyond mere deathmatch play.

That's to say nothing about the laser-refined stealth gameplay in a 20-hour campaign and graphics that still look gorgeous today. "Our first prototypes mixing normal mapping with rain effects were quite complex and very ambitious at the time," reveals Ferland. "Each raindrop had to be hand-drawn. Today, such complexity is...only a few clicks."

Chaos Theory received the highest score in the original-Xbox era of *OXM* with a 9.9 out of 10. "We all went crazy when we learned about the score," says Ferland, "but I couldn't celebrate with the team that night because my wife gave birth to our only child on the same day the game launched. Let's call this a combo!"

5 Halo 2

XBOX • 2004

Some readers may be surprised that *Halo 2* isn't in our list's top slot — and don't think it wasn't discussed. The graphic valley between the visuals of the original *Halo* and its sequel is, well, uncanny — is this the same hardware? And *Halo 2*'s gameplay contributions are just as mighty: a double-sided narrative, dual-wielding mixed weaponry, hijacking vehicles, and probably biggest of all, Xbox Live play with support for clans and deep online stat-tracking courtesy of Bungie.net. And as for the campaign's abrupt ending? "People were upset because they wanted the game to keep going," says designer Tyson Green. "There are worse fates."

We think *Halo* established the Xbox, and for Bungie's next trick, *Halo 2* established their dominance as the premier Xbox developer. And we still love playing swords matches on Lockout.



6 Gears of War

XBOX 360 • 2006

With a high-res, war-ravaged world and exhilarating melee combat, *Gears of War* was driven by two phrases: "destroyed beauty" and "intimate violence." "They support each other," explains executive producer Rod Fergusson. "Having a destroyed world enabled us to put cover wherever it was required to make the game fun, and we pushed for intimate violence so players would be able to see their enemies up-close." That paid off in thrilling dividends: *Gears* offered a gloriously gloomy and gritty action movie full of big personalities with even bigger guns (and chestplates). It also gave the 360 its first original blockbuster franchise, with all the fan support that comes with it. "There's been a nonstop display of tattoos on my MySpace page," says design director Cliff Bleszinski. "One guy even chose to brand himself with the Crimson Omen — *branding*, like a cow. It completely blows my mind to this day that we were able to craft something so compelling to people that they'd be willing to scar their bodies for it. It's just as flattering as it is kind of creepy."





7 Fallout 3

XBOX 360 • 2008

With *Fallout 3*, "we wanted to make you feel like you were seeing *Fallout* for the first time again," says executive producer Todd Howard. "To really make it come alive, to make you sacrifice to survive, and to build the most realized world of destruction anyone had seen." Wandering the wastes of western civilization could have been the single most depressing action-RPG concept ever, but *Fallout 3*'s character progression, story-filled side quests, and clever combat system are trumped only by the constant rewards of exploration. There's something new around every dilapidated building, and when you find it, it will probably try to kill you. "Making the wasteland feel big, desolate, lonely, yet exciting at the same time was hard," admits Howard. "We went through some major scale changes, from doubling the size of the wasteland to removing half of downtown D.C. We did at least three major passes on the world, adding and removing the right level of interesting bits."

8 Rock Band 2

XBOX 360 • 2008



The funny thing about Harmonix? They're not really game developers. "We're a company made up of musicians," says senior designer Dan Teasdale, "and our goal from the start was to find a way to get the awesome experience of being in a band across to people who aren't musicians or aren't in bands." The first *Guitar Hero* games did that on a solo scale, but *Rock Band* — or rather, its sequel — offered everybody a jam session. *Rock Band 2* fixed problems and omissions from the first game (notably online career play), and the unified DLC support (including the ability to import all of the first game's songs for a $5 fee) makes it our go-to edition.

Solving some of the multiplayer matching issues involved problems "that no other games have ever had to deal with," describes Teasdale. "Now that we've done it, I'm incredibly proud of how seamless it is to get people in and out of the game — but back then our evenings were filled with many late-night dinners and whiteboards with flowcharts." Whiteboards & Flowcharts — hey, that's a good band name.

9 Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic

XBOX • 2003

Attack of the Clones had nothing on BioWare's epic journey into the *Star Wars* galaxy — in fact, a lot of fans believe the game trumps Lucas' own midichlorian-addled vision for what the *Star Wars* backstory should be. Exotic planets, outsized characters (we still love hearing smartass droid HK-47 call humans "meatbags"), a comfortable mix of real-time and turn-based gameplay, and a clearly defined battle between good and evil...well, maybe not. *KOTOR* was the first RPG in the modern era to let player choice strongly drive the story path. The Force has never been stronger, but even *KOTOR* had its...disturbances. "We'd built almost all the levels," remembers art director Derek Watts, "and Casey [Hudson] came in and said they made the characters look too small, we needed to scale all of them down by 25%. The level artists had a fit. We had one guy who sat in his office for a week and refused; I had to talk with him, along with the lead level artist, to convince him to scale them down. I think he still hates us for that."

10 Grand Theft Auto IV

XBOX 360 • 2008

"F*** all this stuff about casual gaming," said Rockstar's Dan Houser to *New York* magazine at the launch of *Grand Theft Auto IV*. "I think people still want games that are groundbreaking." *GTA IV* lived up to that goal, in all respects — from the sprawling, heavily accented tale of American dreamer Niko Bellic to the largest, most lifelike multiplayer sandbox 360 owners may ever see. To give the Scottish developers from Rockstar North the proper New York inspiration for Liberty City, Rockstar videotaped the streets of the boroughs and sent tapes across the pond; HDTVs in the studio kept the images on a loop for constant inspiration.

The results are anything but static. Shifting weather, television stations that blast out original content at all hours of the day, tons of crazy citizens with tens of thousands of lines of dialogue...Liberty City itself lives, breathes, and quite often coughs up blood. Lots of it. "If you don't like any violent content in your entertainment," quipped Houser, "then I apologize, because I do."



GEARS REMIX: "One avenue we explored early in development of *Gears of War* was using a hip-hop soundtrack instead of an orchestral one," reveals Epic's Rod Fergusson.

THE LAST LAUGH: In 1992, the fledgling Fox network aired an apocalyptic sitcom called *Woops!* — sort of like *Gilligan's Island* for the nuclear holocaust. Woops! It was canceled.

THE TOP 100 XBOX GAMES OF ALL TIME



11 Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay

XBOX • 2004

In 2004, licensed games often sucked; there was no reason to expect a Vin Diesel sci-fi story to change that. But the team at Starbreeze knew that. "We were willing to do whatever it took to avoid the trap of being 'another crappy movie game,'" says lead designer Ian Stevens, now head of game production for Diesel's Tigon Studios. That included 100-hour work weeks and team members "literally living in their cubicles," recalls Stevens. "We were getting sick from the lack of sleep and enduring the Swedish winter, and at least three of the guys were dumped by their girlfriends because of all the work."

The suffering generated one of the most brilliantly executed, visually stunning shooters ever…unless you ask "Vanilla Ice." "A guy calling himself 'Vanilla Ice' told us we'd made the worst game he ever played and asked for his money back," remembers Stevens. "He even left his address so we could send a check."

Don't waste time tracking down the original version: *Butcher Bay* has been faithfully rebuilt and enhanced for Xbox 360 as part of *The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena*. It's still a stunner.

12 BioShock

XBOX 360 • 2007



"*BioShock* had quite an identity crisis during its development," says 2K Marin's creative director, Jordan Thomas. "It took a lot of hard decisions to get it to something that offered *depth*, and that offered some strongly supported choices while being a kickass first-person shooter. All that took a while to perfect."

Depth is the ideal word to describe everything about Andrew Ryan's submerged utopia, Rapture. Ken Levine and his team stuck us in an art-nouveau world of extreme ideologies and extreme danger, bathed in a luscious neon glow. As you genetically splice your way to superpowers, you find that this world plays by its own rules and breaks all the natural laws. And that plot twist is simply among gaming's best.



13 The Orange Box

XBOX 360 • 2007

Impeccable quality meets unbeatable value. Three chapters of "the thinking man's shooter," *Half-Life 2*, were joined by the online juggernaut *Team Fortress 2*, but the true surprise was first-person puzzler *Portal*. "Our goal with *Portal* was to make an adult-themed game — the most important adult theme being 'Adults are busy people who don't have 30 hours to waste playing *Portal*,'" says writer Erik Wolpaw. "The great thing is, a lot of the people who play *Portal* FINISH *Portal*. They do some puzzles, hear a few jokes, murder their only friend, fight a giant computer monster, and get a nice song on their way out the door. They get a complete, satisfying start-to-finish adventure, all in like four hours. We're really proud that we pulled that off."

"On behalf of the entire team, we want to thank you for this honor," adds Wolpaw. "We're not gonna kid you: We like awards. And if that's wrong, then, very seriously, we'd like an award for not being right."





14 Left 4 Dead



XBOX 360 • 2008

"Whenever I needed to quickly explain *Left 4 Dead* to someone, it was these three things — kill zombies, see cool sh*t, with your friends," explains Valve's Chet Faliszek. "That may have oversimplified what we were trying to do, but it made it clear to everyone the type of game we were trying to make."

We can't think of a better summary. The resulting ride through the wreckage didn't stop to let you catch your breath; with a fiendish A.I. Director constantly pushing you and three friends toward (and, thanks to long-tongued Smokers, dragging you away from) safehouses, *L4D* became a shining example of pitch-perfect co-op play on Xbox Live.

15 Ninja Gaiden Black

XBOX • 2005

One of the Xbox's most brutal games — in terms of both graphic violence and difficulty — almost didn't make it to the platform. Work started in 1999 with an eye toward the Dreamcast, then shifted to the PS2…but after seeing Microsoft's new hardware, designer Tomonobu Itagaki made the game an Xbox exclusive. Fans of super-fluid combat loved the mix of gameplay elements — a bit of platforming, some RPG-style leveling, and a whole lot of obliterating the demonic fiends in Ryu Hayabusa's path. Single-player slashing was simply never done better.



Ninja Gaiden Black gets the nod here over 2004's *Ninja Gaiden* for its extra value — both DLC Hurricane Packs are included, and the additional Ninja Dog skill level is so easy, even human beings can complete the game. Maybe.

EVERYTHING'S CONNECTED: *Ninja Gaiden* takes place two years before the first *Dead or Alive* tournament, giving one of the fighting series' most popular characters a full backstory.



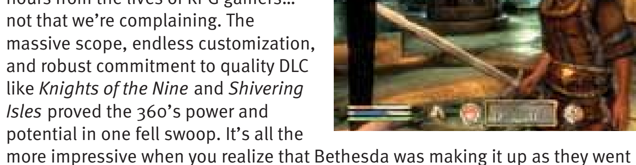
16 Braid

XBLA • 2008

The watercolor world of *Braid*'s melancholy hero, Tim, looks vaguely familiar: the ladders and platforms of Jonathan Blow's XBLA masterpiece recall classic Nintendo design. But this is no hop-and-bopper; every puzzling stage of *Braid* must be solved through trial and error. It's rare that every element in a game comes together, but *Braid*'s story, design, soundtrack, and art direction fuse perfectly right up to the haunting, mind-melting climax. "In general, we've tried to avoid videogame clichés like the 'icy world' and the 'lava world,'" says artist David Hellman in his insightful online portfolio (*http://davidhellman.net/braid*). "We do have an 'ancient ruins world,' but it's not gratuitous!" Beautiful, challenging, and thought-provoking in more ways than one, *Braid*'s currently the best game that Xbox Live Arcade has to offer.

17 The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

XBOX 360 • 2006



Oblivion is a good name for a game that wound up sucking hundreds of hours from the lives of RPG gamers… not that we're complaining. The massive scope, endless customization, and robust commitment to quality DLC like *Knights of the Nine* and *Shivering Isles* proved the 360's power and potential in one fell swoop. It's all the more impressive when you realize that Bethesda was making it up as they went along. "We were doing all-new tech for a new console that didn't even exist yet," remembers executive producer Todd Howard. "It was a pretty stressful time. I'd put it this way: we spent four years on the game, and 95 percent of that was spent wondering if the game would even run."

18 Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter

XBOX 360 • 2006

The future of warfare looked pretty freakin' awesome just a few months after the launch of the 360 — and it still does. The innovative interface, the Cross-Com cameras, and the tight multiplayer came from the combined — if not always synchronized — talents of both Red Storm and Ubisoft Paris. "We had so much trouble coordinating two very large development teams across an ocean and several timezones," admits *GRAW* producer Robbie Edwards today. "With so many people working on the game, it was impossible to keep track of every change and keep all portions of the game development in sync. When you are so completely absorbed in your work, it becomes impossible to remain objective. The fact that *GRAW* is being recognized in this manner is a clear testament to the passion and talent of the development teams."



19 Dead Rising

XBOX 360 • 2006

Don't tell the lawyers, but we still think of this as *Dawn of the Dead: The Game* — in all the nicest ways. How else can you sum up a zombie infestation that takes place in a shopping mall? The hardcore nature of the game (such as the need for RPG-style leveling and the limited save options) may hurt its rep in some circles, but the visceral thrill of dispatching the undead with samurai swords and HDTVs in equal measure made it very much worth replaying.

20 Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30



XBOX • 2005

In addition to its gritty historical accuracy, *Road to Hill 30* was lauded for its "plan first, shoot later" approach — as in the real World War II, running your squad tactically was the only way to survive. But another strategy game almost snuck in under the radar. "In the first concept treatment, we planned to include some light RPG elements," says Mike Wardwell, the game's lead level designer. "The player would spend time at HQ messing with inventory, trading cigarettes for gear, and even playing poker — to capture the 'military mystique' of a soldier's life in the war. We soon realized that there were things we needed to do, and things we wanted to do, and poker was at the bottom of that list. Later in development when deadlines got real, we would often joke about adding poker just to get a good laugh."

Best. Controller. Ever.





In 2002, the Xbox brought us something we'd never seen before and don't expect to see ever again: the biggest friggin' controller ever produced for a home console. *Steel Battalion*'s custom dashboard features 33 buttons, switches, and levers, plus three foot pedals — all of which control your VT, short for "vertical tank," which is fancy for "giant robot mech." Just shy of three feet wide and a foot deep, the controller works only with the cockpit-based simulator for which it was designed (and its 2004 sequel, *Line of Contact*), and only a few thousand were made. But those few thousand have found their way into the homes and hearts of hardcore players, who still play peer-to-peer Free Mission matches on Xbox Live today. Capcom still deserves credit for bringing this monstrosity to American shores simply because they could.

OTHER BUTCHER BAYS: *Riddick* was conceptualized as a non-linear sandbox game. Ian Stevens says, "At one point, it was suggested that it be an outright fighting game."



21 Burnout 3: Takedown



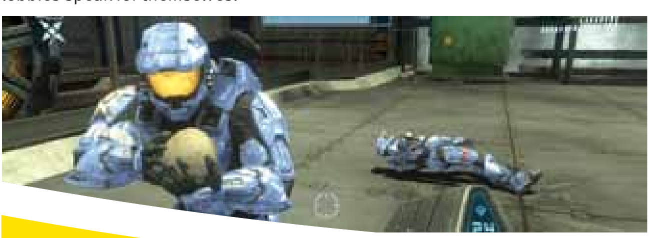
XBOX • 2004

The Criterion team polished *Burnout*'s racing formula to a showroom shine with the third lap — then slammed into a wall and laughed. *Takedown* really does offer the best of both worlds: Speed freaks will love the refined arcade racing, while sadists generally agree that Crash mode was never better, thanks to Crashbreakers and post-collision "aftertouch" controls that let you steer your flaming wreck into harm's way for more points. If you're not giggling through *Burnout 3: Takedown*, you're screaming.

22 Halo 3

XBOX 360 • 2007

"As work was progressing on Forge, films, file sharing, multiplayer game modes, et cetera," recalls designer Tyson Green, "I remember someone coming up to me and saying, 'I am concerned that we aren't doing enough…'" From user-created maps to hidden terminals chock full of cryptic alien backstory to save-able screenshots and replays, Bungie gave *Halo* fans a super-deluxe send-off, with an accent on the social experience. The still-crowded online lobbies speak for themselves.



23 Street Fighter IV

XBOX 360 • 2008

After reviving *Street Fighter II* on XBLA, Capcom hit fighting fans with the ultimate sucker-punch: a full-fledged sequel that couldn't possibly live up to the legacy…could it? And yet it does, with a gorgeous, hand-painted look and a return to "the simple and pure fun that we used to enjoy with *SFII*," says producer Yoshinori Ono. Rewarding for technical players but still fun for noobs, *SFIV* looks and plays like an all-time champ.



Paul's #101

Dead Space

XBOX 360 • 2008

I almost don't want to go here after all the inexcusable vileness that showed up in the comments of our website version of the review. But while I respect the review and opinions of my colleagues who wrote our review, for me, *Dead Space* was something pretty different — and pretty great. I loved the combat, the sci-fi atmosphere, the vacuum-walks, the story, and especially the rad holographic HUD! I didn't like getting scared all the time because I'm a big fat sissy like that, but I'm sure stoked for the sequel.

24 Fable II

XBOX 360 • 2008



The star of this game wasn't the bad guy or the world or even the dog — it was emotion. That sounds sappy, but it's true: Peter Molyneux's goal was to get players invested in his fantasy world. With compelling character choices (careers, spouses, children, houses), refreshingly vibrant voice-acting, and a similarly lush world, it was easy to care about the comings and goings of Albion.

25 Mirror's Edge

XBOX 360 • 2008

In a sea of strong but expected sequels last year, *Mirror's Edge* took a literal flying leap into the unknown. Guns aren't necessary, and neither is the ground — Faith's rooftop runs as a futuristic messenger on the wrong side of a totalitarian regime force you to read your environment in ways that few games require. Then you read them again to find a more dangerous but ironically less deadly path. A fresh idea, beautifully executed — that's what we want from Xbox gaming.

26 Guitar Hero II





XBOX 360 • 2007

If you look at the big, chunky white guitar controller, *Guitar Hero II* seems so long ago. But when you think of how the game made you *feel* — that first, intense shot of musical make-believe, when you and a friend rocked out to "Hangar 18," laughing as you failed — well, that's as fresh as yesterday. *Guitar Hero* went from cult to phenomenon after its 360 appearance, and it's still a fun and rewarding experience, long after setting the foundation for the genre's evolution.

27 Peggle Deluxe



XBLA • 2009

PopCap's spin on pachinko proves to be almost illegally addictive once you start bouncing balls off pegs and pulling marvelous, high-scoring trick shots. You may never get around to finishing all the devious single-player challenges if you get sucked into four-player Peg Party matches on Xbox Live. And the latter actually proved pretty tricky for the developers to get just right. "Our only goal was for it to be totally and utterly awesome," says studio VP Sukhbir Sidhu with a smile. "We are humble folk."

28 Grand Theft Auto Double Pack

XBOX • 2003



Okay, so PlayStation 2 got *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City* first. But is it fair to say that Xbox got them best? For their patience, Xbox owners were rewarded with the complete crime sagas together in one package, enhanced with superior graphics and full 5.1 surround. These are the controversial games that laid the groundwork for every open-world/sandbox game that followed. And some would argue that in terms of style and execution, most games never beat them.

29 Fight Night Round 3

XBOX 360 • 2006

We never used to like getting hit in the face, but *FNR3* changed all that with its photorealistic depiction of the sweet science. Gone were the tacky health bars and blinking red danger zones, replaced by disturbingly accurate bruises and cuts, caused by disturbingly accurate physical punches. Ali, Frazier, Hagler, Leonard… everything looked perfect, even as you pummeled it out of recognition. *Fight Night Round 3* was the first game we played that made us think, "*That's* what a next-gen game looks like."

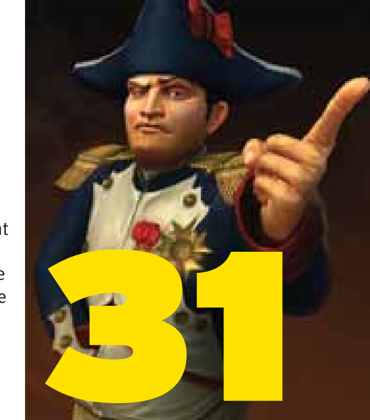
30 Uno



XBLA • 2006

It's hard to find someone who hasn't played this colorful card classic…but even we didn't expect it to become the monster XBLA hit it turned out to be. Wide brand awareness, simple mechanics, elegant online implementation, and the social nature of the game itself led *Uno* to sales in excess of 1.4 million copies (and according to Microsoft, it's still selling strong). Jump on Xbox Live right now — you'll find people waiting to play with you. That's longevity.

31 Civilization Revolution



XBOX 360 • 2008

Even though it seemed everyone knew point-and-click strategy games don't work as straight ports to console, no one saw fit to do what needed to be done: Start from scratch with the console in mind. Now a handful of games have finally done it, but none have done it better than this. Excellent balance, an appropriate learning curve, and a great interface is all we ever wanted. Well, that, and to rule the world.

32 Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge

XBOX • 2003

Oh, those magnificent men in their flying machines! And when we say "men," we mean "sky pirates." An alternate-history 1930s provided a rollicking backdrop for early Xbox Live arcade dogfights, as experimental airplanes zipped around zeppelins and generally made stuff blow up heroically. This game's ubiquity doesn't dull its lasting appeal; it's still got moxie, toots.

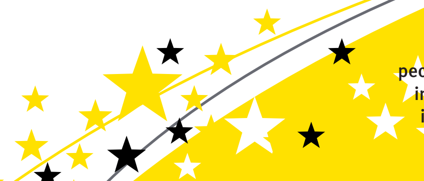
33 Resident Evil 5

XBOX 360 • 2008

A two-player game at its core, *RE5* thrives in a co-op setting: two heads are better than one for solving puzzles, and also for keeping each other alive. And it shares none of the pokey pace of its predecessors — this is an action shooter all the way. Just bring a friend, or you're robbing yourself of seeing *RE5* at its best.

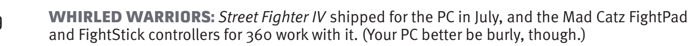
Ryan's #137

Advent Rising



XBOX • 2005

Yes, this Orson Scott Card–penned action-adventure was hyped to hell, and it's not only a technical mess, but it even starts off painfully slow — you begin powerless and stuck talking to random people in a bar. Hang with it, though, and you'll witness Card's compelling sci-fi, epic-scale narrative unfold in cutscenes and character revelations that keep you glued to the screen. Better still, the actual gameplay in *Advent Rising* is structured so that your abilities continue to evolve and improve throughout the game. You're continually doing new and cool things right up to (and through!) the end credits.



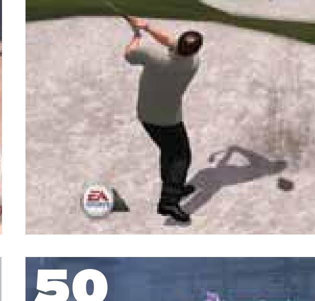
WHIRLED WARRIORS: *Street Fighter IV* shipped for the PC in July, and the Mad Catz FightPad and FightStick controllers for 360 work with it. (Your PC better be burly, though.)

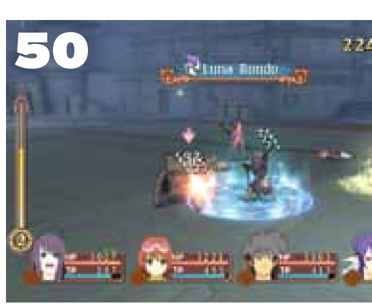
THE PERFECT DRUG: "Many review comments compared *Peggle* to crack," says PopCap's Sukhbir Sidhu. "That's something to be proud of…I think."

THE TOP **100** XBOX GAMES OF ALL TIME





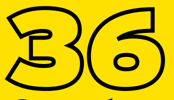



34 Halo Wars
XBOX 360 • 2008

Like #31 above it, *Halo Wars* cracked the console strategy problem with brilliant interface design. The rich, expanded *Halo* lore was icing.

35 Grid
XBOX 360 • 2008

Take the *TOCA Race Driver* simulation series, give it a fresh engine for 360 and a more welcoming feel, and watch us smile for miles.



36 Condemned: Criminal Origins
XBOX 360 • 2005

Lots of games ask you to collect rings or stars; only one asks you to collect dead birds. *Condemned* followed the first-person adventures of FBI agent Ethan Thomas as he tracked a serial killer through dank and dilapidated urban environments, attacking murderous vagrants with makeshift weapons like steam pipes and flaming 2x4s. The scariest 360 launch title still inspires nightmares... even if it originally aimed for the stars. "The game was pitched to be far more sci-fi than it turned out to be," says Sega's associate producer, Martin Caplan. "At the time, the serial-killer–hunting angle was seen as the strongest by far, so the horror element was turned way up — to the point where in *Criminal Origins*, there are no sci-fi elements at all." Play this one with the lights on.



37 Assassin's Creed
XBOX 360 • 2007

Stalk targets and free-run your way across the rooftops of medieval cities in a stunning stealth game with a surprising sci-fi twist.

38 Crackdown
XBOX 360 • 2007

When Realtime Worlds CEO Dave Jones asked, "How do we reward somebody for just having fun?" (and he did), this super-powered game of cops & robbers was the answer. We loved leaping buildings in a single bound...then shooting people.

39 Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time
XBOX • 2003

We never met a wall we couldn't run on, and we never had more fun doing it than in this time-twisting action-platformer. An example of a license revival done right.

40 Saints Row 2
XBOX 360 • 2008

Gang warfare at its most ludicrous and hilarious. Great campaign co-op play with plenty of stuff to do...and *do in*.

41 Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved
XBLA • 2005

Live Arcade's first legitimate breakout hit still kicks our asses on a regular basis with its twin-stick twitch-shooter assault. Curse you, green thingies that chase us but run away from our shots!

42 Psychonauts
XBOX • 2005

You may have heard us mention this hilarious-yet-underselling platformer once or twice, or perhaps 300 times. Sorry. It's brilliant.

43 Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast
XBOX • 2002

Lightsaber battles CAN work in a first-person shooter! Plus, the compelling story did the license justice.

YES, TIM SCHAFER IS CRAZY. *Psychonauts* protagonist Raz was originally going to be a mentally unstable ostrich. One analog stick would make him move, the other would peck.

44 Top Spin 3
XBOX 360 • 2008

The controls demand finesse, but once you master them, you really do feel like a master. This is realistic, rewarding tennis.

45 Dirt
XBOX 360 • 2007

What fun is controlling a race car if you don't feel like you could lose that control at any moment? Buckle up and *hang on*.

46 Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3
XBOX • 2003

A great action-oriented campaign with nifty voice commands and killer online play. This game ruled Xbox Live for a reason.

47 Hitman 2: Silent Assassin
XBOX • 2002

Solve puzzles with your mind, then solve problems with your sniper rifle. A slick, stealthy, lethal package.

48 Forza Motorsport 2
XBOX 360 • 2007

Hard to say which was more impressive: the challenging-but-not-punishing sim racing, or the stunning fan-created liveries. We declare it a tie.

POCKETS & PORTUGAL: *Viva Piñata* was conceived as a Pocket PC title called *Your Garden* in 2002. The 360 game was the first ever translated into Portuguese.

49 Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08
XBOX 360 • 2007

Putting your photographed face on your avatar is creepy. Putting your shot challenges on Xbox Live for everyone to try is brilliant.

50 Tales of Vesperia
XBOX 360 • 2008

A beguiling mix of endearing JRPG cuteness, surprising storytelling, and real-time battles, *Vesperia* is the genre's finest 360 outing.

51 NHL 09
XBOX 360 • 2008

Finally, you get to take your skater from the AHL to superstardom — and you're rewarded for true teamplay. And yes, 12-player online games!

52 Viva Piñata
XBOX 360 • 2006

This ain't no kiddie game — it's a candy-coated (and candy-filled) ecosystem that rewards careful and strategic management. Yum.

53 Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow
XBOX • 2004

It delivered all the stealthy thrills of the first game, only with better production values and with groundbreaking spies-vs.-mercenaries multiplayer.

Juliann's #151
Outpost Kaloki X
XBLA • 2005

Don't underestimate the quirky charms of running your own space station! Build lemonade stands, manage supply and demand, and let your zen business owner flow. Four years later, there's nothing else quite like it on XBLA. Cute artwork, jazzy tunes, easy controls, and some great DLC campaigns make this one of my favorites.





54 Burnout Paradise
XBOX 360 • 2008
Throwing the world wide open didn't slow *Burnout*'s breakneck pace or spectacular crashes. Also, this is the ultimate in fan-service DLC support.

55 Gears of War 2
XBOX 360 • 2008
The story was more over-the-top and more touching than the first go-round, but Horde multiplayer clearly set a new co-op standard.

56 Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords
XBOX • 2005
More excellent storytelling in that galaxy far, far away. New Force powers kept it fresh, too.

57 Need for Speed: Most Wanted
XBOX 360 • 2005
Cop chases have rarely been more knuckle-whitening than they were here. Slick and challenging street racing, all the way through.

58 Hexic HD
XBLA • 2005
"Hey, look, a free puzzle game on the 360 hard drive!" Hey, look, there goes your entire weekend. An incredibly addicting pack-in gem.



59 Catan
XBLA • 2007
The Settlers of Catan is destined for the board-game hall of fame, even if most Americans don't know it. The trading/building strategy gameplay of the reverent XBLA edition, simply titled *Catan*, feels effortless, but its creation was not. "We conquered all the challenges we had *expected* fairly quickly, in the first four months of development," recalls Brian Reynolds, project leader/programmer/interface designer for *Catan* and founder of its developer, Big Huge Games. "But getting the multiplayer to be consistently stable and otherwise 'passing certification' took another eight months of slow bleeding."

Catan's lower profile doesn't take anything away from its brilliant, balanced XBLA implementation. "I wish we'd been able to afford to do, well, *any* marketing for the game, but at the time there just wasn't a budget," says Reynolds. "We had to ship the thing and hope players would find it themselves. Fortunately, many of them did."

60 Breakdown
XBOX • 2004
A great sci-fi story coupled with uncompromising first-person innovation — you never change the perspective. Honestly, they had us with the poison hamburger.

61 Skate
XBOX 360 • 2007
Tony Hawk may have invented skateboarding gaming, but *Skate*'s analog controls and skate-vid style reinvented it for the 360.

62 Project Gotham Racing 3
XBOX 360 • 2005
Even when you remove the launch-colored glasses, *PGR3*'s cockpit view and balance between arcade and sim racing still looks cool.

63 Marvel: Ultimate Alliance
XBOX 360 • 2006
Avengers assemble! Now squeeze nearly every other Marvel character in there, too. Addictive action-RPG fun with Earth's mightiest heroes...and all their friends.

64 Soulcalibur IV
XBOX 360 • 2008
Button-masher or killer tactician? You'll find plenty to love — and unlock — in Namco's beautiful brawler. Plus, Yoda.



65 Bomberman Live
XBLA • 2007
In many ways, *Bomberman Live* is a love letter from Hudson's explosive mascot — part apology for the disappointing 360 outing *Bomberman: Act Zero*, part earnest "by fans for fans" implementation of a true twitch-action classic. Job one for XBLA: sweat the details. "Hudson has a technical document that explains every detail of the *Bomberman* universe," says producer Peter Dassenko. "It covers everything from the geometric dimensions of the hard blocks — they do not have 90-degree angles — to the rate at which fire expands from an exploding bomb to the exact way Bomberman swings his arms when he runs." The team clearly got it right: all those little pieces combined to give *Bomberman Live* the same long-lasting appeal as any of the finest entries in the franchise.

66 Prey
XBOX 360 • 2006
When you find yourself running on the ceiling after sliding through a portal in space/time and resurrecting through the spirit plane...well, we *hope* you're playing this shooter.

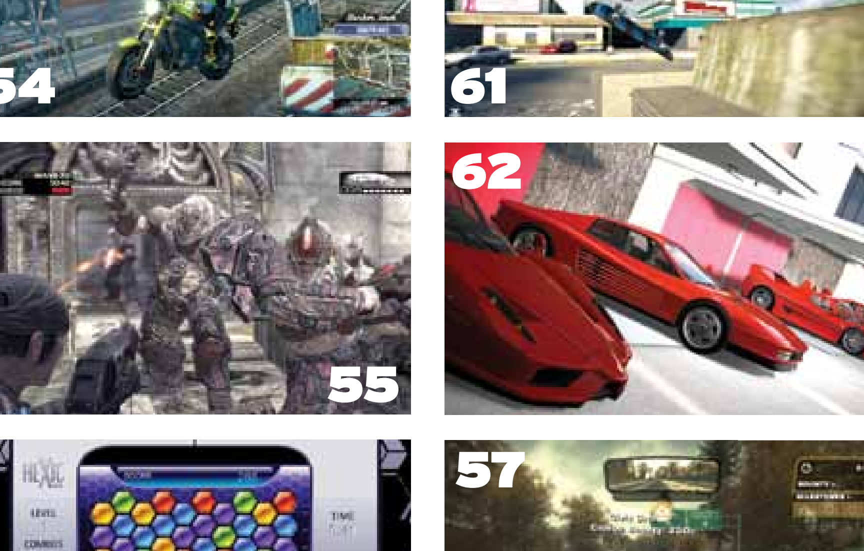
67 MVP Baseball 05
XBOX • 2005
The last year that the MLB license was a free agent was the last year we had a really good baseball game.

68 Lost Planet
XBOX 360 • 2007
Capcom's insect-infested, sci-fi winter wonderland had a great sense of scale and juggled Japanese game aesthetics with a more Western shooter bent.

69 Silent Hill 2: Restless Dreams
XBOX • 2001
The Xbox edition of this all-time horror classic featured exclusive bonus content that enhanced its already disturbing and highly literate story.

70 SSX 3
XBOX • 2003
Go big or go home: Snowboard a slope from top to bottom in 30 real-time minutes, tricking as you go. Sweet, sweet freedom.

71 Thief: Deadly Shadows
XBOX • 2004
All you needed to survive as medieval bandit Garrett was a blackjack, some fancy arrows, and supreme stealth skills.




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Corey's #184
Bully: Scholarship Edition
XBOX 360 • 2008
Cynics would call *Bully* a watered-down *GTA* (and cite its glitches, which have since been fixed with title updates), but you can't ignore its impact on open-world games. Not only were most of its characters *kids* — unheard of in this genre — but it proved that with creative design, even killing is unnecessary. Whether you were dissecting frogs in biology class, running errands for unscrupulous teachers, or kissing girls (or other boys — an option only Rockstar would dare include), your adventures as juvenile Jimmy Hopkins were amusing and engrossing.

EFFICIENCY: "Now that it's done, I'd personally rather play *Catan* on the 360 controller than with a mouse," admits Brian Reynolds. "It's a quicker and more streamlined process."

MARY OLD ENGLAND?: *Silent Hill 2*'s creators named James' wife, Mary, after Mary Kelly, a victim of the infamous Jack the Ripper. Silent Hill is not a happy town.

72 Conker: Live and Reloaded

XBOX • 2005

Foul-mouthed squirrels versus homicidal teddy bears in a 16-player online deathmatch? What's not to like?

73 Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict

XBOX • 2005

Enjoy deathmatch bloodsport in first- or third-person, and a funky mix of shooter and melee combat — all lightning-fast.

74 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas

XBOX • 2005

After *Vice City*, how do you make *GTA* better? Make it bigger, with three cities and a sprawling story to match. (Hot coffee not included.)

75 Jet Set Radio Future

XBOX • 2002

If Tokyo 2024 isn't filled with day-glo graffiti artists on rollerskates and mad hip-hop beats, we are going to be *so* disappointed.

77 Lego Star Wars: The Complete Saga

XBOX 360 • 2007

First they did the prequels. Then they did the original films. Then they did them all in one adorable, time-sucking package. With online co-op.

78 Scene It? Box Office Blast

XBOX 360 • 2008

Pure family fun for movie-trivia fans (complete with integrated HD clips). We love those controllers even more than the Live support.



79 Tomb Raider: Legend

XBOX 360 • 2006

Crystal Dynamics saved the action-adventure franchise from itself. About time Lara was treated like a lady.

80 Hitman: Blood Money

XBOX 360 • 2006

In a nice story shift, the hunter becomes hunted; what's more, the missions are full of options, and the assassinations are full of character.





76 Gun

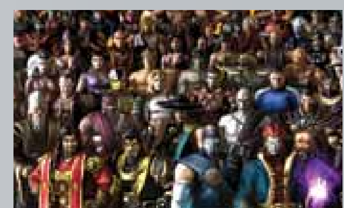
XBOX 360 • 2005



"Western games don't sell." It's one of those myths that *Gun* sadly proved...but this isn't the Top 100 Best-Selling Games of All Time. Its unflinching, non-linear tale of ridin', shootin', and justice on the American frontier won our hearts with the right mix of action and storytelling. "We really wanted to give the player a true experience of the Old West — the brutality, the savagery, the bigotry, and the beauty," says Neversoft's president (and real-life ranch owner) Joel Jewett. "Just living day-to-day was a struggle." Naturally, the team followed suit. "*Gun* was a real uphill battle and a true labor of love — a whole new A.I. and navigation system, all-new shooter controls and gameplay, streaming in a whole living world from a different era...yeah, lots of late nights. But we had to do it." Fans regularly ask for a sequel, but it's not likely, since Western games...well, you know. "I personally would love to build on what we started," admits Jewett. "Worst case, I'll just have to try to re-enact it myself at my place in Montana."

82 Mortal Kombat: Armageddon

XBOX • 2006



As its apocalyptic name suggests, *Mortal Kombat*'s final appearance on the original Xbox was also the final chapter in the bloody soap opera of Outworld — and a playable curtain call for every character that had ever appeared in an *MK* game. That's exactly as impossible as it sounds. "Our biggest obstacle was the mental strain whenever we would look at the big picture of what it would take to finish the game," recalls Ed Boon. "More than 60 characters, single-player Konquest adventure game, Motor Kombat, and Create-a-Fighter...*all online*?! Just listing all the features now, I can't believe we ever finished the game."

In addition to a streamlined and less confusing fight system, *Armageddon*'s Create-a-Fighter option let fans put themselves in the game...not to mention clones of their favorite fighters from other franchises. But a few folks crafted characters from even more epic struggles. "One guy online made a perfect Abraham Lincoln," notes Boon. "His two fighting styles were 'Freedom' and 'Emancipation.' Genius."







81 Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Double Agent

XBOX 360 • 2006

A very different Sam Fisher battles terrorism from the inside. Daytime missions offer nowhere to hide, cranking up the tension.

83 MechAssault

XBOX • 2002

This popular giant-robot game offered arcadey smackdowns without that simulation stuff getting in the way. And you could play on Live!

84 XIII

XBOX • 2003

Cel-shading was something of a fad there, but this spy shooter, based on a French comic, proved the style's narrative worth.

85 Dead or Alive Ultimate

XBOX • 2004

Specifically, *Dead or Alive 2 Ultimate* in this two-disc package — it's the prettiest, most accessible, and best-tuned fighter on the original Xbox.

86 Full Spectrum Warrior

XBOX • 2004

Originally built as a military simulation for the Army, this strategic shooter put realism and tactics front and center in a world of spray-happy military shooters.

87 Otogi: Myth of Demons

XBOX • 2003

Stylish, vibrant graphics and destructible environments earned this hack-and-slasher a loyal cult following. Score one for creativity.

88 Madden NFL 09

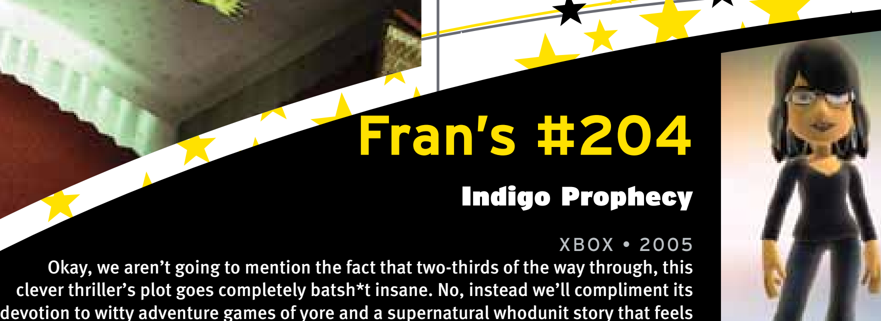
XBOX 360 • 2008

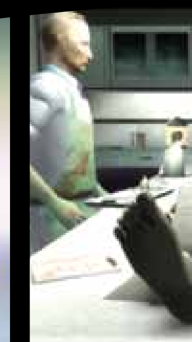
The latest one's often the greatest one, but the sweet graphics, fantasy football, and clean online play can't be denied.

89 The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind

XBOX • 2002

Remember when *Elder Scrolls* was just a cult series of RPGs? Those pioneering non-linear days of escapism are still a hell of a lot of fun.



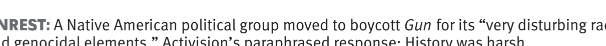


Fran's #204

Indigo Prophecy

XBOX • 2005

Okay, we aren't going to mention the fact that two-thirds of the way through, this clever thriller's plot goes completely batsh*t insane. No, instead we'll compliment its devotion to witty adventure games of yore and a supernatural whodunit story that feels right — even when it all goes wrong.

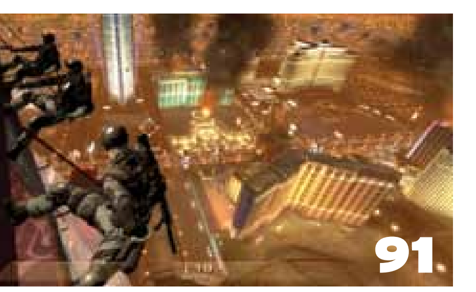


UNREST: A Native American political group moved to boycott *Gun* for its "very disturbing racist and genocidal elements." Activision's paraphrased response: History was harsh.

HIKE: We'll throw a little extra love at the value-packed Collector's Edition of *Madden NFL 09*, which included *Head Coach 09* as well as a revamped *Madden 93* with updated rosters.

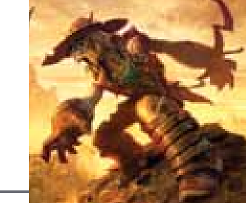






90 WWE Smackdown vs. Raw 2009
XBOX 360 • 2008
It's simply the most accessible entry to the franchise, with the best controls so far.

91 Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six Vegas
XBOX 360 • 2006
Our inaugural trip to Sin City included absorbing tactical battles and rappelling down buildings. Shell casings make great souvenirs.

92 Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath

XBOX • 2005
A complete departure from Abe's puzzle quests, *Wrath* was a bounty-hunting first-person shooter. Wonderfully weird.

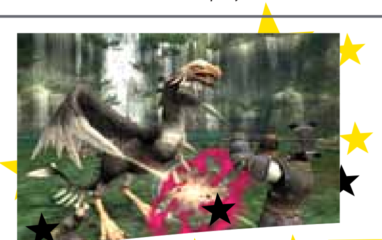
93 Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Tides of War
XBOX • 2003
We enjoyed the story, but the class-based multiplayer mode alone made this a legend. A crucial milestone in Live's evolution.

94 Deus Ex: Invisible War
XBOX • 2003
Freeform first-person RPG inventiveness, with a streamlined interface and a stellar story. What can we say? We're suckers for quality.

95 Fight Night Round 4
XBOX 360 • 2009
We didn't think hitting a guy as hard as possible could look any more realistic, but the proof's right there on the screen.

96 Links 2004
XBOX • 2003
Pure and simple golf fun, with unbeatable four-player games on Xbox Live. And still surprisingly pretty today.

97 Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell
XBOX • 2002
Real-time lighting, cloth deformation...the Xbox was pushed to early tech heights with stunning stealth gameplay. Solid who?

98 Max Payne

XBOX • 2001
Score one for style — the inventor of bullet time did it better than anyone in this gloomy noir shootout.

99 Undertow
XBLA • 2007
Fantastic 2D deathmatches under the sea...and amazingly, it was less than 50MB, per the Live Arcade limit at the time. A technical marvel and a multiplayer riot.

100 Final Fantasy XI
XBOX 360 • 2006
The first MMO on an Xbox console, and it was cross-platform to boot. Say what you will, but the only other MMO to appear since is, arguably, *1 vs. 100*!

Dan's #999
Circus Maximus: Chariot Wars
XBOX • 2002
It seems that nobody but me remembers this Roman chariot racer's unusual two-player co-op driving/fighting gameplay. One player steers an angry chariot around treacherous courses, trying not to flip the thing, while the combatant in the back stabs away at passing competitors. For the hardcore solo player, have fun doing both at the same time. If this thing came out today with Xbox Live support, I honestly think it would find its cult niche. Until that magical neverday comes, I think it's an underappreciated Xbox-exclusive gem.





COLD WARRIOR: When Sam Fisher meets his contact at the Chinese embassy in *Splinter Cell*, his password is "A cold day in April" — the opening line of George Orwell's novel *1984*.

next

You've heard the news that came out of E3. A fancy new motion sensor. Molyneux's talking-kid game-thingie. Facebook and Twitter...and a Marketplace for Avatars! But what you want is every single detail, neatly sorted and analyzed so you know exactly how your Xbox 360 will grow, change, and evolve in the coming months. Check out our guide to getting ready for all the slick new gizmos headed to your dashboard.

BY PAUL CURTHOYS & MIKE CHANNELL





► (Top) Gamers have been asking for it, and they're going to get it — custom Avatar clothing based on (and even borrowed from) popular games. Shown here: *Halo 3*'s store, but there's much more to come.
► (Bottom) "And...here...we... go!" Eight friends at a time can watch the same movie and comment on it, *MST3K*-style.

AVATAR MARKETPLACE

Release Date: August

It's been rumored forever, but it's not the diabolical money-extractor that some haters feared it would be. Yes, an Avatar Marketplace channel is coming to your dashboard, and yup, you'll be able to buy premium clothing there (there's no set pricing; it's up to the companies selling it). Microsoft promises a regular supply of free clothing, too, and best of all, it's adding in-game awardables. So if you win the Super Bowl in *Madden* or score a killtacular in *Halo 3*, he developers can reward and recognize that feat with free clothing and/or costumes that open up in Avatar Marketplace. You'll also find storefronts inside it dedicated to specific games like *Halo 3*.

But we're all going to nerd out about props, which are essentially something that your Avatar holds in its hand, like a guitar, trophy, cell phone, or *[shudder]* pom poms. The coolest example we saw was a cute little Avatar dude dressed up in ODST armor holding a remote control that steered a tiny remote-controlled Warthog in circles around his feet.

NETFLIX PARTIES

Release Date: August

Wahoo, at last! Yes, eight people will be able to gather in a lobby skinned to look like a movie theater and watch Netflix content together in real time. Of course, you can yak it up over voice chat, and as in *1 vs. 100*, you can also tap buttons to trigger Avatar animations. The view is from behind as the Avatars sit on the couch — it reminded us a ton of *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. The update will also include improved Netflix functionality that lets you browse categories and add movies to your Instant Queue directly from your 360.

GAMES ON DEMAND

Release Date: August

This one's already begun...sorta. The Xbox Originals section of Marketplace has been renamed Games On Demand. Come August, you'll also be able to purchase older Xbox 360 games like *Mass Effect, Assassin's Creed, Oblivion, Civilization Revolution, Dirt*, and more as downloads. Games won't be released in stores and on Marketplace on the same day; it'll be more of a "classics" program in the vein of Platinum Hits.

Manuals will be available on the Marketplace website, and you'll be able to pay for these downloads with a credit card, debit card, or Microsoft Points. (Everything else on Marketplace still must be paid for with Points only.) We envision hard-drives filling up all over the place, but Microsoft had no specifics when we asked whether bigger HDs were on the way, saying only that they were keeping an eye on that. Hrmph.

DASHBOARD IMPROVEMENTS

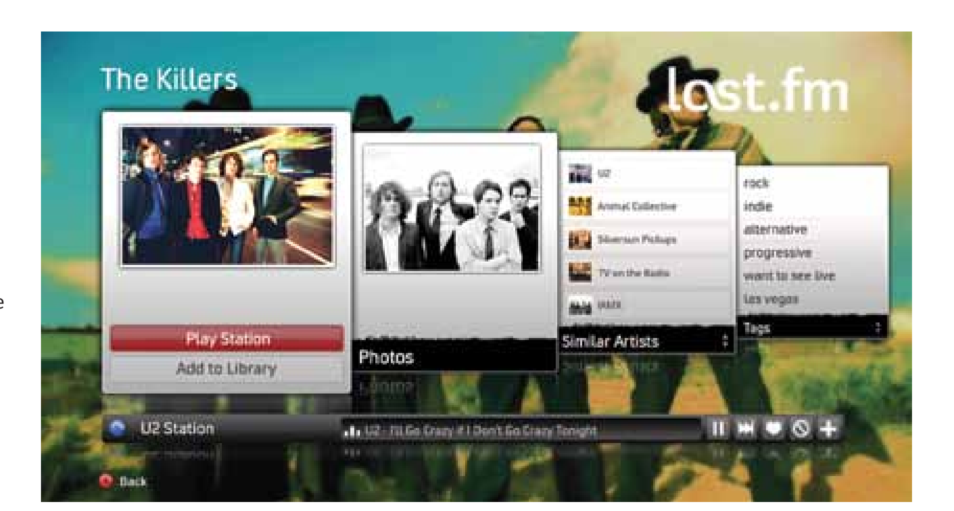
Release Date: August

We're lumping together some small but cool stuff here, most notably the ability for user ratings of games and downloadable game add-ons. It's a five-star system like Netflix's: You simply select the title in Marketplace and click on the stars to register your opinion. In other news, Live's network is being upgraded to improve its performance, particularly the guide and friends-list access. Microsoft's also tweaking the view for Achievements, friends sorting, and its matchmaking support.

LAST.FM

Release Date: Fall

Another new channel coming to your dashboard: Music. Along with stores for *Rock Band, Guitar Hero*, and *Lips* tunes, you'll also find Last.fm, the web music powerhouse. It's for Gold members only, and gives them access to millions of songs for free, as well as personalized stations. Not to get greedy....but what about Pandora? We love those guys!





► (Top) There's a U2 station on Last.fm? That can mean only one thing: superfan Paul picked the screenshots for this article.
► (Bottom) Last.fm offers stations of similar artists — but you can create your own stations and recommend them to your friends.

Y'ALL TAKE OFF YOUR CLOTHES A LOT!: Xbox Live's Marc Whitten told us that, as of early June, there had been 100 million Avatar clothes-changes so far.

IT'S ON: When asked if Microsoft wants to compete with trendy games-downloading service OnLive, Whitten said, "I believe very, very deeply in the future of digital distribution."







▶ (Top) A special perk for UK viewers: Watch satellite-TV sports matches with friends. No North American equivalent has been announced, but here's hoping.
▶ (Middle) Man, Twitter is *everywhere*! Even your freakin' Avatar can tweet!
▶ (Bottom) Now you can have two Friends lists on your 360 — the usual one and a Facebook one. Fortunately, you can make the twain meet with the Friend Linker.

ZUNE MARKETPLACE & SKYTV

Release Date: Fall

Video Marketplace is being renamed Zune Marketplace, but that's just branding. The real news is that with the new logo comes instant-on HD video in 1080p with 5.1 sound. And yes, by "instant-on," Microsoft means that it aims to create a disc-like experience, including fast-forwarding and skipping with no lag while the download catches up.

Your broadband connection will need to clock in at at least 8MB/sec. downloading to support that, and if it doesn't, the experience will be, um, adjusted to compensate. Fortunately, that speed is pretty standard, so most folks should be fine. We honestly find the instant-on stuff kinda hard to believe — especially given how laggy video has been for us on Xbox Live. But when questioned, Microsoft's GM of Xbox Live, Marc Whitten, was very confident in the performance, saying they'd developed proprietary codecs that already were working at that level.

Last but not least, Zune Marketplace will be expanding support from the eight countries it's currently in to 18, adding Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland (Hi, Europe and Down Under!). And if you live in the UK or Ireland, you're extra-stoked. A deal with SkyTV means gamers there can watch live TV programming, including soccer and cricket matches, in the same eight-player party setting that's coming to Netflix. Can you imagine if we could gather around an NFL or NBA game that way in the States?

TWITTER

Release Date: Fall

It's already everywhere, but soon Twitter will be on Xbox 360, too. It'll be designed for use with a controller rather than a keyboard, and you'll be able to read, reply, and post tweets from the dashboard. Crap, that was longer than 140 characters — we gotta start practicing!

FACEBOOK

Release Date: Fall

Another winner in the get-your-own-channel-on-the-dashboard department, Facebook's arrival on 360 has a cool Xbox-only twist: Facebook Connect. It'll let you capture screens and stats from games that support it and send them to your Facebook profile.

The developers have to code this in, though, so while this feature won't work with older titles, EA's planning to have the next *Tiger Woods* game support it, for example. And of course, you'll also be able to view your Facebook friends and photos, read updates, and submit your own.







▶ Peter Molyneux's project *Milo and Kate* (above) had its doubters, but we saw it running — it's real. Among its more impressive tricks: reading your movements as you reach out to make the water ripple (left) and reading a piece of paper from the real world and copying it into the virtual one (right). Apparently, Kate is a dog (not the lady in the red hoodie), but we haven't yet seen her in the game. Hopefully we can import the dog tricks we unlocked in *Fable II*?

PROJECT NATAL

Release Date: TBD (Our guess: Fall 2010)

We all knew it was coming; the rumors had gone on too long. So when Microsoft started talking about motion controllers at its E3 press conference earlier this summer, our first reaction was "of course." Then they went ahead and blew us away with Project Natal, which is definitely not the Wii-alike that we were expecting. Natal's promo reel (the one you've probably watched on your dashboard about five times by now; if not, you gotta see it) shows player movements being perfectly replicated on the TV screen. In a fighting game, the oh-so-happy-to-be-playing-games actors dodge blows and land punches; in racing games, they hold an imaginary steering wheel to drive; and in quiz-show games, they buzz in by smacking their fist into their palm.

The technology has implications beyond this kind of traditional gaming — the system recognizes your face, automatically signing your profile into Live. From there, you can try on Avatar clothing before you buy it, or use voice recognition and simple hand gestures to page through the dashboard with just a wave of your hand — or start a film by saying "play movie."

All that's hugely impressive in a concept video, but then we got to check it out in action and try it ourselves, and the technology *is* pretty amazing. First up was a simple physics-based ball game called *Ricochet*, where we swatted balls back at a wall of bricks by flailing our arms and

WHAT ABOUT US?: Longing for a U.S. deal like the SkyTV one? Whitten would only mysteriously say that it's "our ambition."

WHY ZUNE MARKETPLACE?: That name change left us wondering if there was more to the renaming of Video Marketplace…like Zune-360 connectivity? No comment…sigh.

PROJECT NATAL (continued)



▶ Microsoft showed a sample driving game in its sizzle video, then set up *Burnout Paradise* to work with Natal to let us try it out.

legs. Every small movement or gesture, every step to the side, was reflected in the Avatar on the screen. When we struck the ball, the game clearly reacted to that movement. And it wasn't just our limbs — our whole body was in play. The ball could be slapped, kicked, and even headbutted, and as more and more balls spawned, we needed to use every limb. We also tried a racing game, driving around in *Burnout Paradise* simply by holding our hands out in front of us and pretending to turn a steering wheel. It was eerie how quickly it felt natural and normal.

Then we got a behind-doors demo of *Milo and Kate*, the brainchild of Peter Molyneux, and that's when the ways that Natal goes way beyond the Wii Remote really became clear. In this game, it's not about jumping around and waving your arms like a lunatic; it's about watching for emotional responses in the face and voice of Milo. He's a child, roughly about 12 years old, who can identify you on sight, compliment you on your clothes, and understand your tone of voice. Tell him a joke, for example, and he'll giggle politely — while he doesn't understand the content of the gag, he understands the patterns in the way humans tell jokes and responds appropriately.

Natal also detected us trying to touch water on the screen, making the surface ripple realistically away from the fingerprint smudge we left on the TV. Most magical, though, was the way the camera reads a sheet of paper that you hold up to it, copying it into Milo's world. Those kind of interactions will really break barriers in what games can do when they're fully realized. Just imagine the possibilities if that sort of interaction makes it into *Fable III*, for example.

So how does this witchcraft work? Rather than the traditional setup found in a Live Vision camera, where there's a single camera and a single microphone, Natal uses several forms of input to get a better image of your body's position in 3D space. The device sits below or above your TV screen, and it has both a standard RGB camera (similar to the one in the Vision camera)

THE NATAL HARDWARE



1. MIC CHECK
With its pair of microphones, Natal is able to compare the volumes from each of the microphones and work out which sounds are someone speaking and which are just ambient background noise. It compares that with its 3D visual data and determines which of multiple players is likely to be the one talking. The distance between the microphones is most likely the reason that this prototype is so wide — the further apart they are, the more detailed positional audio data it can calculate.

2. RED ALERT
Natal's ability to pick up the shape of the human form is heavily reliant on an infrared diode and sensor. The diode essentially bathes the scene in infrared light, and the sensor then picks up an image of where objects are in the room and how far away they are from the camera. The major benefit of this approach is that it works in any lighting conditions and can apparently pick up detailed 3D information about an object or a person.

3. CANDID CAMERA
In addition to the fancy 3D detection, there's a standard color camera as well. It allows images of players to appear on the screen itself for video chatting and for the snazzy facial recognition that allows the console to automatically sign you into Xbox Live. It's the combination of this traditional visual data with the 3D data that is key to Natal's power.

4. THOUGHT PROCESS
All the complex math required to turn a human being into 3D data takes a big chunk of processing power, which would normally mean a game would have to be less complex if it were to include Natal support. Fortunately, the Natal hardware has its own processor that can do the number-crunching by itself, so the Xbox 360 console is able to dedicate its full power to the game.





▶ (Top) One device, two people? Natal's sensors can detect multiple bodies for multiplayer gaming.
▶ (Bottom) Imagine a skateboarding game with no skateboard. This may not be good news for *Tony Hawk: Ride*, but we like the potential.

YOU REMEMBER RIGHT: Yes, Netflix parties and Primetime were originally announced as spring 2009 releases. Nothing nefarious — they just took a bit more time to get done.

ALSO MISSING IN ACTION: A few years back, Microsoft did a lot of talking about IPTV and Live Anywhere coming to 360. Still nada, although the SkyTV deal is IPTV-like.

PROJECT NATAL (continued)

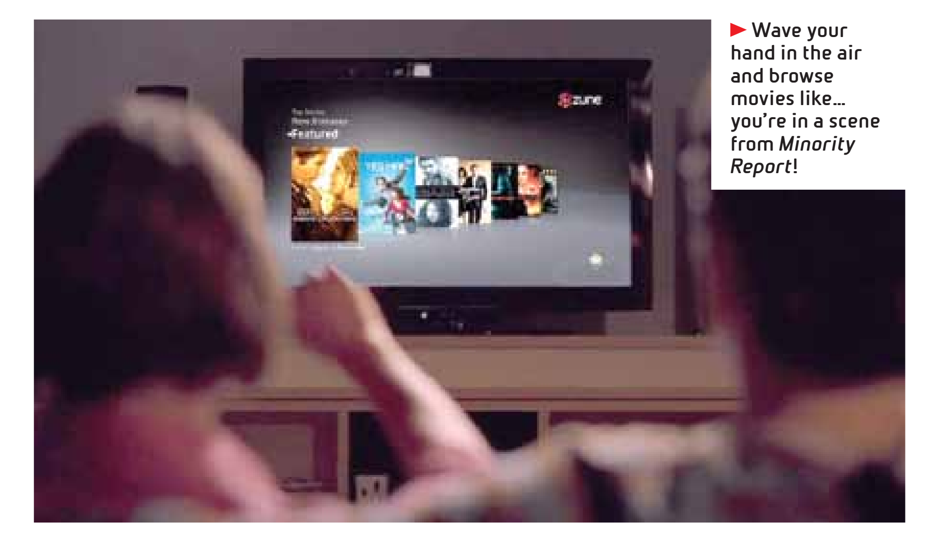
and a black-and-white infrared sensor, which allows it to get a detailed idea of depth in even the gloomiest of rooms. Using data from these two cameras, the brains of the operation — a processor built into Natal that runs a custom piece of software — interprets the data and works out the position and shape of your body, determining where your arms, legs, torso, and head are in real time.

Depending on how the game wants to use that data, Natal is apparently accurate enough to detect the movements of individual fingers. Not only that, but it can also pick up multiple players in a single room, so we'd wager that Microsoft is shooting for up to four active players at once to match the four-controller input on Xbox 360.

Coupled with that location data is clever voice recognition, which recognizes specific words. Thanks to multiple microphones, it can also work out which player is speaking, allowing for multiplayer voice-activated gaming.

Essentially, Natal provides raw data, and it's up to the game designers to decide how they use it. Perhaps the most exciting applications are the ones that allow you to interact with physical objects in the world — when you're converted into a 3D avatar in the game, your body can be plugged into game physics that are already capable of calculating the force of, say, a punch to a face.

It's clear that Natal has the potential to change the way we play games forever. While there are obvious ways the technology could be applied to casual and exercise-based games, remember that Natal isn't a controller. That means it could easily be used in more hardcore games that require a controller as well, increasing immersion by reading the player's response and adding more involving features — or in games we haven't imagined yet. Natal's final release is still a ways out, but with development kits already in the hands of major game studios, we can't wait to see what the future holds.



▶ Wave your hand in the air and browse movies like… you're in a scene from *Minority Report*!

MOLYNEUX ON MILO



OXM: A few of our more crude colleagues have suggested you could have made more money if, instead of Milo, you'd made a beautiful lady instead. Was that ever considered?
PETER MOLYNEUX: No, it wasn't. You know, you could have any character, you could have a female character or whatever, but who are we making this for? Why are we doing this? We're doing this because there's a huge number of people in this world who do not play computer games, and if you really want to reach people like that, we've got to show them something they have never ever seen before. And yeah, you could show them a huge-breasted woman lounging on the couch — would it appeal to those kind of people? I don't think it would, not in the slightest, and that's what we're trying to do. There's something amazing and charming about Milo and Milo's world. When people interact with it, they're going to be hooked. Making a character that is a kid seem real is easier for us to do than some adult, and infinitely better than some caricatured thing.

OXM: Are you bringing any of your dog stuff from *Fable II* into the game?
PM: Well, it is called *Milo and Kate*, and Kate is a dog. We're doing a lot of work on it anyway for other stuff, so it'd be silly not to.

OXM: Is it a proper project with plans for release?
PM: It's a game, and it's been in production since before Natal. It's got a story, and I would love to release it when Natal is launched; that'd be cool.

OXM: So it was an idea you were working on, and Natal came along and was perfect for it?
PM: Yes. It's something I've been thinking about for a long time: trying to create a game where you really felt the character was real.

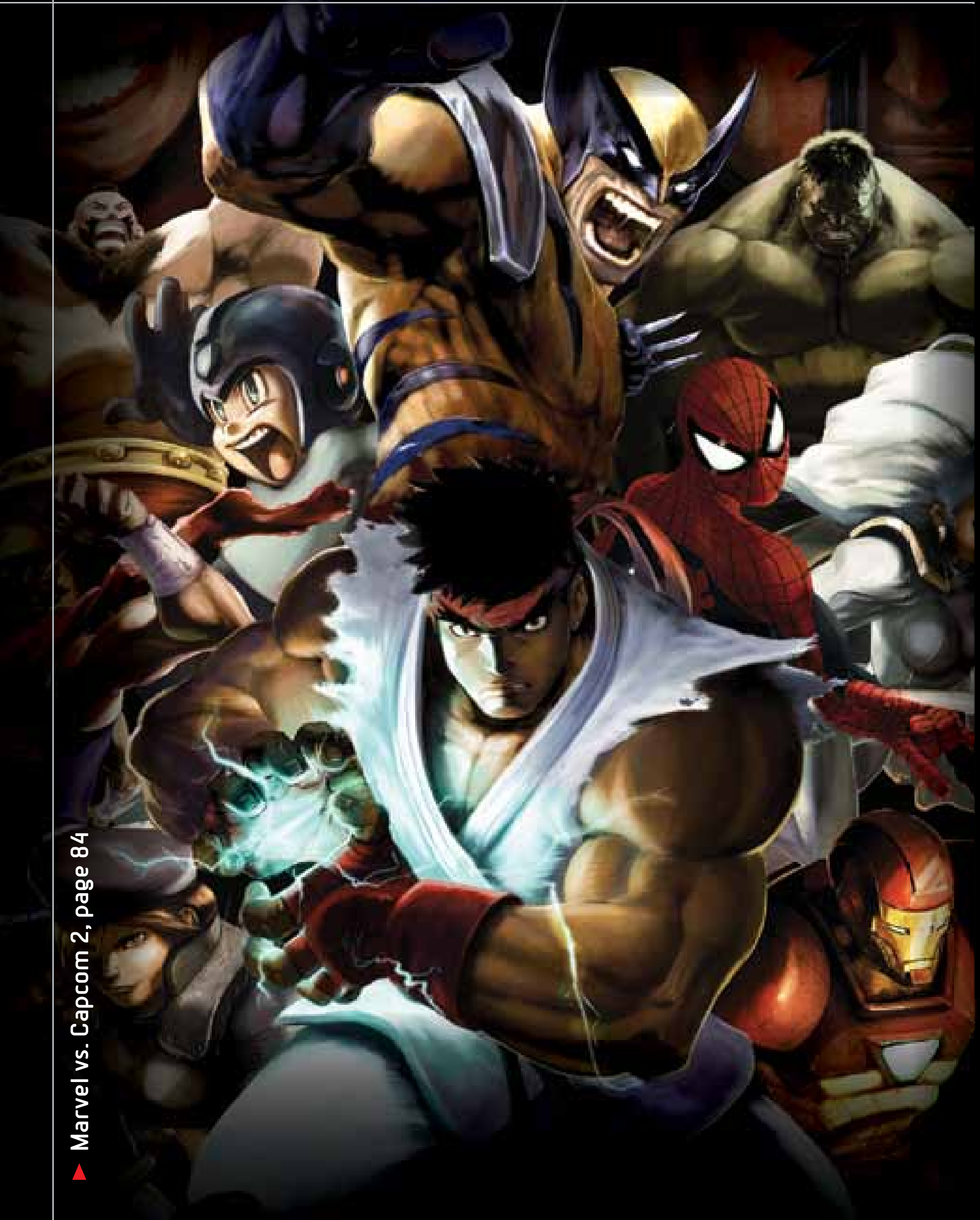
OXM: Isn't there still a slight uncanny-valley thing going on?
PM: Here's the thing that's absolutely true. When you play it, you don't get any of that. When you see it being played, especially on a video, it comes across slightly out, but it's still early on — we're still tweaking it. Ninety percent of the time it's fantastic.

OXM: We have these visions of people forming unhealthily clingy relationships with Milo. Is that sort of the point?
PM: The reason we've chosen this is because it is amazing how when you play the game, it will remind you of your childhood. It's almost impossible to form an inappropriate relationship with Milo; it's just not something that's possible to do. I think people will find it amazing and charming and joyful.

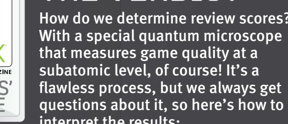
YOU REMEMBER RIGHT #2: Nope, Molyneux didn't mention a thing about Kate or the fact that she's a dog at Microsoft's E3 press briefing. Scoop!

XBOX NOW

Get All Our Review Scores…Now



▲ Marvel vs. Capcom 2, page 84



THE VERDICT

How do we determine review scores? With a special quantum microscope that measures game quality at a subatomic level, of course! It's a flawless process, but we always get questions about it, so here's how to interpret the results:

11: PERFECT MECHA GODZILLA'S CHOICE
The unicorn. Will never happen. Never.

10: CLASSIC EDITORS' CHOICE
One of those rare and very best of games. Every Xbox gamer simply must buy it and play it, regardless of whether they're a fan of the genre.

9.0 OR 9.5: AWESOME EDITORS' CHOICE
Very impressive. One of the best games around. May have a few minor problems, but they're small and very easily tolerated.

8.0 OR 8.5: GREAT
A great game and an A-list title, but it either has niche appeal, suffers from minor technical or design issues, or has peripheral problems like a crummy interface.

7.0 OR 7.5: GOOD
Has a lot of good things going for it, but there's a big problem or two — something that limits its appeal or gets downright annoying. Could also be a game that aims low but hits surprisingly high.

6.0 OR 6.5: DECENT
An adequate game with something interesting to offer, but it has some truly significant issues. Otaku won't mind much, but the rest of the world will.

5.0 OR 5.5: MEDIOCRE
Very unspecial and average in the worst sense of that word. You can't pound it for being terrible, but it's hard to find something that makes it worthy of recommendation.

4.0 OR 4.5: DEFICIENT
It has some very serious flaws and problems, but you can play it if you're interested. It works and does what it sets out to do, but it probably never aimed that high in the first place.

3.0 OR 3.5: WOUNDED
It has some crippling problems and is poorly conceived and designed. You can imagine someone wanting to try it, but not that many people, and they all should rent before they buy.

0.0 – 2.5: BROKEN
Just really bad. Lacks a single redeeming quality, and/or it's busted to varying degrees in its design, quality, or basic functionality. No gamer of any stripe should bother.



▶ NCAA Football 10, page 80



▶ Sam & Max Save the World, page 85

NEXT MONTH: Better late than never, we're planning on rounding up the giant batch of arcade classics that Sega dropped into the XBLA bucket in our next issue! Stay tuned.



▶ Road to Glory, the new Campus Legend mode, has a prettier interface and is hosted by sideline reporter Erin Andrews…but it's still kinda boring to be stuck playing as one player all game long.

▶ Check out the slick web interface for building and importing teams…

▶ The graphics definitely got prettier, especially the lighting and the stadiums. And there are marching bands all over the place!

▶ The trio of Lee Corso, Kirk Herbstreit, and Brad Nessler is still doing the best commentary in sports videogames.



▶ You can lock yourself into one player for the duration of the play.

Platform: XBOX 360   Publisher: EA SPORTS   Developer: EA TIBURON   ESRB: EVERYONE
Multiplayer: 2 on same screen or Xbox Live; 12 in Online Dynasty   Selling Points: It all came together this year

NCAA Football 10

Bring out the trophy!

Sometimes when you're doing something as a group — team sport, band, whatever — everything kinda clicks, and you can almost feel it. This season, *NCAA Football 10* has that feeling. Between some innovative new online features and a mess of shrewd tuning, it's the kind of compulsively playable game that sports fans will have a hard time tearing themselves away from.

Our insta-favorite is the new Team Builder. On the web (*teambuilder.easports.com*), you can use an impressively rich set of tools to craft everything from your team's logo to their uniforms, field, roster, and more — you can even upload a jpeg to use as your logo. It's hypnotizingly addictive to fuss over every detail, and we absolutely expect this feature to spawn the kind of creative community that produced so many dazzling paint jobs in *Forza 2*. In-game, you can grab teams from whoever you want, although EA does cap the number of teams you can download at 13 (or 120 if you pay extra via DLC…ugh!). And while the web interface is brilliant, bizarrely, the in-game one is kinda clunky. Rather than automatically downloading the teams you built under your own Gamertag, it forces you to search for your own schools. It's totally worth the trouble, though, because it's really cool to see the team you kitted out in action on the field.

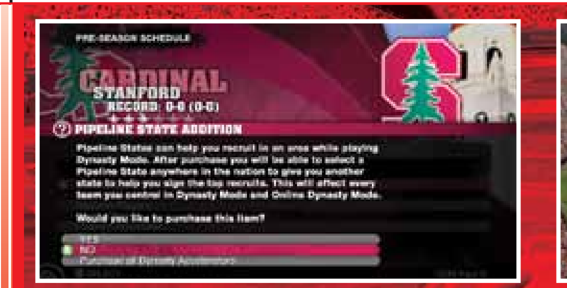
The other new biggie is Season Showdown, a meta-game where you pledge allegiance to one school for the whole year — the real-life year, not the game one. As you play *NCAA*, you rack up points for everything from making tackles to showing sportsmanship by not running up the score. The points of everyone who plays the game are tallied into a massive tournament that builds all season long toward a single-elimination tournament of the top 32 schools. The whole idea taps perfectly into the sports-gamer psyche — so many of us will be madly hooked on this.

And then there's the way the on-field gameplay has just gelled. You'll notice right away that the pursuit angles are way more realistic, and you can also break the feeble little tackles you should break, rather than going down almost anytime someone touches you. New strategic options — adjusting offensive/defensive parameters from aggressive to conservative, guessing whether the offense will pass or run, and chewing up the clock faster — add a lot, although one falls a bit short. Certain plays in the playbook are linked, and if you run one play enough, its linked play becomes "setup," and you're practically guaranteed big yards if you run it. It makes sense big-picture, but the links are limited and arbitrary, and to succeed at it, you feel forced to stick with a too-small number of plays.

Dynasty mode remains as awesome as ever, online or off.* New ways of searching recruits and the addition of recruiting against another school kept us staring at those stats-heavy screens even more than usual…but we have one serious bone to pick. Offers to buy Dynasty Accelerators, which are essentially cheat codes for sale, are built into the game everywhere — in fact, they're the very first thing that pops up when you start a dynasty! They temptingly offer better recruiting, coaching, training, and more…but when did cheat codes become something that costs extra when we've already bought a $60 game? It comes across as crass and greedy.

But if there's one thing sports fans are used to tuning out, it's advertising where it really doesn't belong. And with *NCAA 10* bringing so much great stuff to the table this year, we'll be happy to keep our blinders on while we bury ourselves in some terrific college football.

— Paul Curthoys











THE VERDICT

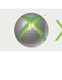
ON XBOX 360

+ Two great innovations: Team Builder and Season Showdown.
+ Great tuning and additions make gameplay compelling.
– Some small clunkiness in a few of the new features.
? How is it right to charge for cheats in a $60 game?



8.5

*WE KNOW: Online dynasties were janky in *NCAA 09*, but we couldn't fully test the mode in our boxed review copy because no one else was playing it yet on Live. We'll update you if trouble strikes.

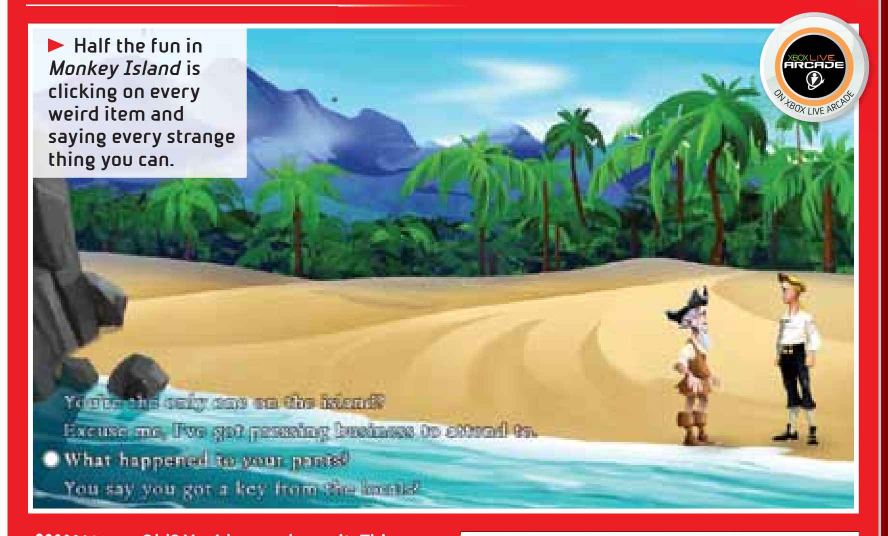


XBOX OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE EDITORS' CHOICE

The Secret of Monkey Island: Special Edition

Look behind you: one of the best adventure games ever!

▶ Half the fun in *Monkey Island* is clicking on every weird item and saying every strange thing you can.



Old? You'd never know it. This screen-for-screen remake of *The Secret of Monkey Island*, one of the wittiest point-and-click adventure games ever made, brilliantly masks its age thanks to its sharp script, clever puzzle-solving, and upgraded-to-HD art that renders the Caribbean prettier than ever.

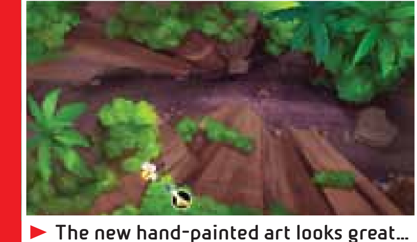
Penned by three of the funniest men in gaming**, *Monkey Island* follows Guybrush Threepwood, a bumbling wannabe pirate whose misadventures take him from Melee Island to Monkey Island, solving puzzles that range from the comically logical (gunpowder + magnifying glass + the sun = explosion) to the cerebrally absurd (remember the old saying "monkey see, monkey do"?) in an effort to defeat the evil ghost pirate LeChuck.

You're likely to get stuck from time to time — it's the nature of the genre — but this special edition adds a handy new hint system: simply hold X anytime for a clue. Keep pressing for stronger hints and, ultimately, the puzzle's solution.

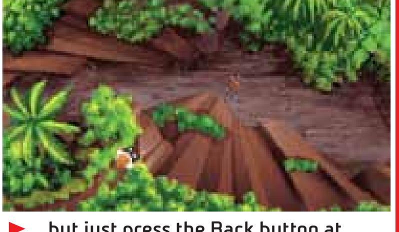
While the 2009 hand-painted HD visuals are beautiful (you can press Back whenever you like to switch to the original graphics and sound), the best thing this version offers is spot-on voice-acting. The original never had recorded dialogue, but the entire cast from 1997's *Curse of Monkey Island* — the first *Monkey* that did — has been reunited here, giving *Secret* a fresh feel even for those who've replayed it annually since 1990.

The only barnacle on this ship is the interface. Actions are bound to LB/LT and your inventory is locked to RB/RT, while shortcuts are on the D-pad. Unfortunately, the 360 D-pad is mushy and imprecise, often resulting in unintended actions. Using the triggers is also a bit cumbersome. But you can never really fail in *Monkey Island*, so no true harm is done. *Secret* is the foremost example of the genre on Xbox — and arguably anywhere else. Should you buy it? Yarr!

— Ryan McCaffrey



▶ The new hand-painted art looks great…



▶ …but just press the Back button at any time to switch to classic visuals.



THE VERDICT

ON XBOX LIVE ARCADE

+ Razor-sharp writing and puzzle-solving.
+ Lovingly crafted updates; stellar voice-acting.
– Minor interface issues.
? Who do we have to bribe to get this same treatment for *Monkey Island 2*?



9.0

Platform: XBOX LIVE ARCADE   Publisher: LUCASARTS   Developer: LUCASARTS   ESRB: EVERYONE
Multiplayer: NONE   Selling Points: Insult sword fighting, grog, pirate-y hilarity   Cost: 800 Microsoft Points ($10)

**WOW: *Monkey Island* creator Ron Gilbert is working on *DeathSpank*, co-writer Dave Grossman brought us *Sam & Max Save the World*, and you already know co-writer Tim Schafer.



The game could use a few more enemy types, especially among the Infected. Thankfully, Hunters are fun — and formidable — opponents.

Prototype

Let it be the first of many

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: ACTIVISION Developer: RADICAL ENTERTAINMENT ESRB: MATURE
Multiplayer: NONE Selling Points: Marvelous feeling of power; compelling take on the open-world game

Once, you were a normal man, a scientist at a biotech firm. Now you're a shape-shifter with unthinkable power. What happened to you...and are you even human anymore? As *Prototype* opens, it's all a mystery. What you *do* know — courtesy of a nifty flash-forward sequence that doubles as a tutorial — is that New York City is crawling with armed forces and diseased monsters, and you're destined to fight both of them. *A lot.*

Open-world games are all about discovery, and in that sense, *Prototype* really delivers the goods. As you muscle through the main story arc, the game slowly explains the virus that's transformed you and infected New York, while clarifying the military's role in these events. Want extra details? They're scattered about the city in the form of 130 special people you can find and "consume." Besides giving you health and XP, consuming these folks lets you view a brief memory of theirs that ties into the overarching plot. Like the diaries in *BioShock*, these bonus snippets add tasty meat to the game's backstory.

The other thing you discover throughout the game — as you unlock it — is your amazing range of powers and abilities. Running up the sides of buildings, leaping huge distances, and gliding through the air (thanks to shape-shifting wings) give you a great "master of your environment" feel that's reminiscent of *Crackdown* and Radical's own *Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction*. But they're just the beginning. Offensively, you're a ruthless antihero: you can turn your arms into soldier-slicing blades, bulk 'em up to bludgeon a tank, or turn them into a whip that scatters hordes of troops. You can also hijack military guns and vehicles to use at will, or pick up cars and pedestrians and fling them at enemies. *Prototype*'s 31 main missions and countless activities (like timed races and assassinations) give you tons of opportunities for *Wolverine*-style bloodshed, too. More than most games, its breadth of interesting powers compelled us to mix them up frequently, rather than spamming a few key moves.

To their credit, the developers didn't just settle for sheer violence; they also incorporated a stealth element that draws on your ability to assume the form of the last person you consumed. It's fun sometimes — there's a devious thrill in munching a base commander, then sneaking into his base as him, for example — but it also highlights some weaker parts of the game. Eating someone without detection can be super-finicky control-wise, and overall, the game's A.I. seems a bit dim: the old turn-the-corner trick made some foes forget our attempts to consume them, and bystanders often freaked out when we killed one of them, but were perfectly calm seconds later. You wouldn't see *that* in Liberty City. And while we're on the subject, can we just say that we're now officially sick of open-world games being set in Manhattan? (At least the *Spider-Man* games have an excuse.)

Still, none of those complaints kills the joy of hopping between skyscrapers and jump-kicking helicopters. *Prototype* offers an engaging tale, and it lets you stomp baddies in endlessly engaging ways. For action and superhero fans, that's an irresistible mix.

— Corey Cohen

Consuming special targets that form the Web of Intrigue lets you view memories hinting at the source of the virus. Many are eerie and apocalyptic.

"You're coming with me."

Who said the skies were safe?


There's something about gliding that just feels right.





THE VERDICT
ON XBOX 360

+ Terrific sense of power and ability: you are mega-badass.
+ Intriguing story structure kept us entertained.
- Stealth portions; so-so A.I. reminds us we're in a game.
? Why's our guy wear a hoodie? Hair-stabbing would've killed.



8.5

SEQUEL FODDER: *Prototype* was originally going to include cooperative play; the feature was removed in mid-development. We'd love if a buddy could join the slaughter.

Guitar Hero: Smash Hits

Another reunion tour motivated by money?

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: ACTIVISION Developer: BEENOX/NEVERSOFT ESRB: TEEN
Multiplayer: 4 in co-op and 2 in versus on same screen or Xbox Live; 4-on-4 band battles on Xbox Live Selling Points: Master tracks of songs you already like; the erasure of Harmonix's legacy



It's missing a few fan faves (no "Hangar 18"?), but *Smash Hits* largely lives up to its name.

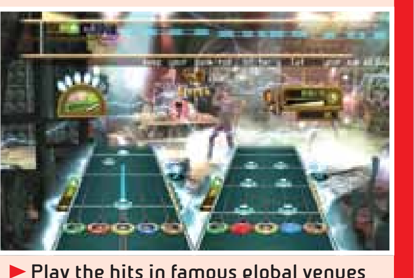
Remember your favorite songs from the first five *Guitar Hero* games? Buy them again! That's the cynic's take on *Smash Hits*, but it's a fair point: Why not take these 48 songs (now master tracks enhanced for full-band play) and offer them as *Guitar Hero World Tour* downloadable content instead of as a stand-alone $60 game? Mostly because it abandons the strict structure of *GHWT*'s frustrating career mode for the freer formula of this spring's *GH Metallica* instead. Maybe too closely: the game does have a distinct feel of "delete Hetfield, add drums and vocals, keep online play and song creator, save as new game." Our review disc arrived with the label "*Guitar Hero 4.2*" — 'nuff said.

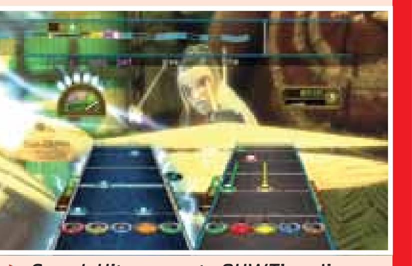
Many of these songs are new to the *GH* series on Xbox 360 (the original *Guitar Hero* and *Rocks the '80s* were PS2-only affairs); for the dupes, it's a great way to test your improved skills at a higher level. These are developer Beenox's new, often trickier note tracks, based on the modern *GH* engine's sustained notes, tapping sections, and double-kick-pedal drums. "Monkey Wrench" is tougher here than it was in *Guitar Hero II*, and open bass notes make "YYZ" feel fresh.

But *Smash Hits* really earns its keep thanks to excellent selection of material. These aren't just "the songs everybody knows," but the songs that are the most fun to play and the ones that truly benefit from the full-band treatment. "Bark at the Moon" already rocks, but it rocks even harder with four players.

Still, that full price is steep for what feels like an add-on disc. Gather your bandmates for a money-saving weekend rental, and you'll have more fun with this collection of oldies than you might expect.

— Dan Amrich


Smash Hits is often more about technical finger gymnastics than enjoying the groove of the music.


Play the hits in famous global venues and deliver a scorching performance to earn arena-themed unlockable outfits.

Smash Hits supports *GHWT*'s online play and GHTunes user-created song library...but not its DLC.

THE VERDICT
ON XBOX 360

+ Wisely chosen oldies benefit from the band upgrade.
+ Better career structure than *GHWT*; all songs unlocked.
- $60 is too steep.
? Why do we still like "Cherry Pie" when we really know we shouldn't?



7.5

THROWING ONE IN THE WORKS: Books from the late 1800s state that the monkey wrench was inaccurately named for its inventor, Charles Moncky. Historians now suggest that's bunk.



▶ How appropriate: Venom's victory over Ken, awash in a burst of crimson red.

Platform: XBOX LIVE ARCADE Publisher: CAPCOM Developer: FOUNDATION 9 ESRB: TEEN
Multiplayer: 2 on Xbox Live or same screen Selling Points: Timeless beat-'em-up; tons of fighters; Live play Cost: 1,200 Microsoft Points ($15)

Marvel vs. Capcom 2



Giving "mash-up" a whole new meaning

If we were *Marvel: Ultimate Alliance 2*, we'd be a bit intimidated. Why? Because in a way, *Marvel vs. Capcom 2* is the comic-book universe's *real* ultimate alliance. It assembles a magnificent pool of 56 Marvel and Capcom characters, and players draw on that to form a three-fighter tag team that'll punch, kick, and blast the crap out of their rival trio. It was a stellar coin-op in 2000, and it's still an amazing fighting game in 2009 on Xbox Live Arcade.

Most of the credit goes to multi-player. When we last saw *MvC2*, it was on original Xbox — with no online play. *[Shudder.]* Thankfully, this XBLA port doesn't repeat that mistake: in addition to *MvC2*'s fairly standard single-player game, it adopts the multiplayer code from Capcom's recent *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix*, and that means silky-smooth bouts over Xbox Live.

The upshot: you and your friends can go nuts in head-to-head matches, pitting, say, Iron Man, Dr. Doom, and Mega Man against Hulk, Chun-Li, and Jill Valentine. With its pared-down control scheme — two punch buttons, two kick buttons, and two assist buttons (each summoning a different partner) — *MvC2* is more beginner-friendly than the *Street Fighter* games. Mashing the punch/kick buttons like a maniac while doing quarter- and half-circles with the analog stick (or better yet, with one of Mad Catz's superb *Street Fighter IV* FightSticks) will generally let you pull off at least one special move per character, like Cable's sweeping Viper Beam or Juggernaut's trembly Earthquake. And with such flashy, screen-filling attacks, the game's fun even when you're seeing just a piece of it.

But *MvC2* offers loads of advanced mechanics for players who invest the effort. With practice, you'll learn when to tag in your teammates; how to execute more moves, including multi-character super-moves; how to do snapbacks (forcing an enemy fighter to swap for a teammate); and other sly strategies that make the game even more fulfilling.

So *MvC2* rewards hardcore fighters; we just wish Capcom had better rewarded hardcore fans. Unlike *Super Street Fighter II* — which also debuted at $15 — this port isn't an HD remix: the developers have simply smoothed the graphics rather than redrawing them, and the music is tweaked a tad, not fully remixed. Consequently, *SSFII* looks and sounds superior, and rather than a *gorgeous* version of *MvC2* befitting the Xbox 360, we get one that plays wonderfully but looks dated. Were this an HD remix, it'd be a better value, and with all the blessed brawlin' goin' on, we'd be doling out an Editors' Choice award.

— Corey Cohen





THE VERDICT
ON XBOX 360

+ A tremendous fighter, and with 56 characters, you'll play for ages.
+ Great multiplayer game with smooth Xbox Live play.
- Would've had more appeal and more value as an HD remix.
? Can we please get an *MvC3* using the *Street Fighter IV* engine?



8.5

TRIVIA: The big boss at the end of the first *Marvel vs. Capcom* was Onslaught, the Magneto-Xavier hybrid from 1990s *X-Men* comics. In *MvC2*, he's replaced by Abyss, a baddie created for the game.

Platform: XBLA Publisher/Developer: TELLTALE ESRB: TEEN
Multiplayer: NONE Cost: 1,600 Microsoft Points ($20)

Sam & Max Save the World

ON XBOX LIVE ARCADE

Warning: extreme hilarity ahead!

▶ Max's penchant for absurdity and extreme comic violence means he provides much of the humor.

Regardless of whether you're an old-school PC gamer celebrating the return of the point-and-click adventure or you're experiencing the genre for the first time, *Sam & Max Save the World* is a breath of fresh air for a console that often takes itself way too seriously. Space marines, deathmatches, and +2 swords are all well and good, but when was the last time you laughed out loud while playing an Xbox game?

The episodic first season of *Sam & Max* delivers continuous LOLs across its six intertwined episodes as you guide the freelance police duo (Sam is the anthropomorphic dog and Max the insane rabbity thing) from their office to the White House to the moon in search of the mastermind behind a plan to hypnotize and enslave the world's unwitting populace.

The gameplay premise is simple: explore environments, talk to people, click on objects, and use whatever you find to solve puzzles by either combining objects with other objects or using them with other characters. In terms of puzzle smarts *and* writing quality, the episodes get better as they go, culminating in the self-aware chuckles of episode five, "Reality 2.0," in which Sam and Max must defeat the Internet itself.

It would've been nice to have the option to adjust pointer-icon sensitivity, and Max occasionally gets in the way, forcing Sam to stop in his tracks and bat him aside. You're also bound to get stuck from time to time, so a layered hint system (like the one in *Monkey Island*) would've been useful. Nevertheless, *Save the World*'s sharp writing and spot-on puzzle-solving make it a hilarious romp that will kick-start your brain and tickle your funny bone. If its $20 price tag causes sticker shock, just remember that for 15 to 20 hours of laughs and gameplay, it's a steal.

— Ryan McCaffrey





THE VERDICT
ON XBOX LIVE ARCADE

+ A heaping helping of honest-to-goodness point-and-click adventure gaming...whoo!
+ Genuinely funny. Tim Schafer's not the only one anymore!
- Niggling interface issues.
? Will people recoil from the $20 price tag? (Hint: don't!)



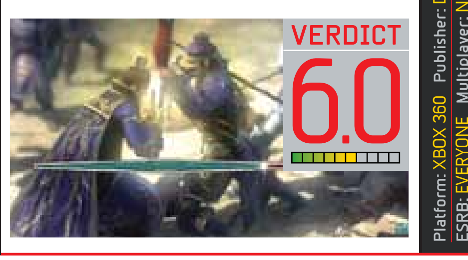
8.0

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: KOEI Developer: OMEGA FORCE ESRB: TEEN
Multiplayer: 2 on same screen

Dynasty Warriors 6: Empires

ON XBOX 360

This time around, *Dynasty Warriors'* horde-slaughtering action is complemented by a greater emphasis on strategy as you attempt to conquer China in Empire mode, the game's meatiest offering. A *Magic*-esque card system buttresses the core, on-the-ground clickfest in which you'll annihilate hundreds of foes in a single battle. The basic premise remains enjoyable, but all of the special skills, pre-war strategy meetings, and character upgrades can't negate *Empire*'s biggest flaw: a downright atrocious camera that is both too sensitive and pulled in far too close to your avatar. Options to numb the camera speed and pull back the view would've gone a long way toward keeping the focus on the good stuff this co-op–enabled warmonger has to offer. — Ryan McCaffrey



VERDICT **6.0**

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: DISNEY INTERACTIVE Developer: EUROCOM
ESRB: EVERYONE Multiplayer: NONE

G-Force

ON XBOX 360

The last time we watched *Mission: Impossible*, we certainly weren't thinking, "Gee, I wish this movie had more guinea pigs." Disney, on the other hand, clearly was. Its rodent-based espionage game is obviously intended for kids who agree with that sentiment, and it certainly plays that way with its simplistic controls, large number of collectibles, and super-easy puzzles. Strangely enough, the game, at points, can be relatively tough. Certain enemies can be difficult to take down because of the iffy targeting system and dicey shooting controls, which could lead to more than a bit of frustration with the younger crowd. The game is abnormally long for a kids' game, and the enemies are a varied bunch, so be prepared to have the young'uns glued to it for a while. — Taylor Cocke

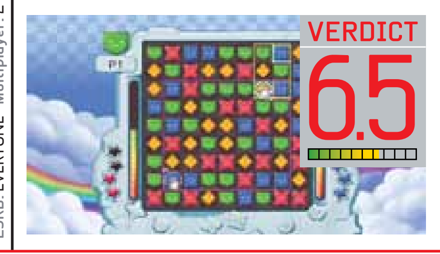
VERDICT **6.0**

Platform: XBOX LIVE ARCADE Publisher: SQUARE ENIX Developer: SQUARE ENIX
ESRB: EVERYONE Multiplayer: 2 on same screen or Xbox Live Cost: 800 Microsoft Points ($10)

Yosumin! Live

ON XBOX LIVE ARCADE

How Japanese can a puzzle game be? Blocks with adorably grumpy faces on them, sherbet-colored playfields, and a *Katamari*-esque soundtrack might give *Yosumin! Live* the crown. It's all dressing for an enjoyably simple block puzzler, wherein you match four corners of any one block to make the entire box disappear. (Two players fight over the same playfield of opportunities in online or couch multiplayer.) It's an enjoyably different mechanic...until you find that you cannot save your Endless or Battle Game progress. Need a break after 25 levels? Next time you start up, it's back to a literal square one — and that's waaaay too old-school for our tastes. This one's strictly for import-puzzle otaku who enjoy relentlessly super-happy fun times yes! — Dan Amrich

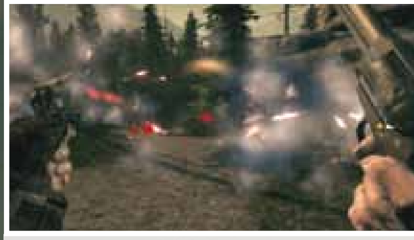


VERDICT **6.5**

TO ANSWER OUR OWN QUESTION: If we're counting correctly, *Empires* is actually the sixth entry in the series for Xbox 360 alone. Another three were released on original Xbox.



▶ "Think we look badass enough like this?" "I reckon so, Ray."



▶ Concentration Mode is wonderful for taking out big numbers of enemies. Or even just finding ones you couldn't see.



▶ After deserting the Confederate Army to protect the family plantation, the brothers show up just a little too late and find it destroyed.

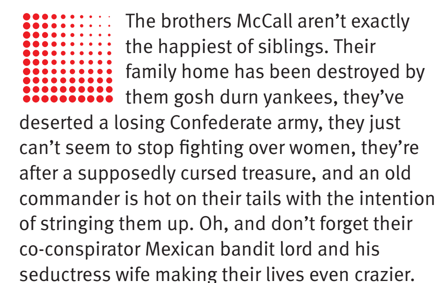
Call of Juarez: Bound in Blood

Just a couple of good ol' boys...

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: UBISOFT Developer: TECHLAND ESRB: MATURE Multiplayer: 8 on Xbox Live
Selling Points: Gunslinging in the Wild West with a refreshingly good storyline

The brothers McCall aren't exactly the happiest of siblings. Their family home has been destroyed by them gosh durn yankees, they've deserted a losing Confederate army, they just can't seem to stop fighting over women, they're after a supposedly cursed treasure, and an old commander is hot on their tails with the intention of stringing them up. Oh, and don't forget their co-conspirator Mexican bandit lord and his seductress wife making their lives even crazier.

If it sounds complicated, that's because it is. The surprisingly deep and enjoyable storyline begins in the Civil War–ravaged South and makes its way into the Wild West and Mexico, and it's staged on absolutely gorgeous landscapes that range from Southern plantations to sprawling deserts and uninhabited ghost towns. In every setting, you can see for miles in every direction, and the scenery's pretty close to picture-perfect. Unfortunately, subpar voice-acting, mute-worthy "jokes" between the brothers, and the eye-rollingly silly ending detract from the otherwise sublime presentation.



But none of those gripes can compare to the biggest crime committed here: no co-op play! In a game that focuses more than a little on the exploits of two seemingly inseparable brothers, why would we not be able to bring a friend down the co-op dusty trail? That absence is completely inexcusable, and the addition of pointless, paint-by-numbers competitive multiplayer only adds insult to injury.

> The absence [of co-op] is completely inexcusable.

The single-player combat that is here, however, is fairly well-done, if somewhat basic. We used Concentration Mode — which stops time so you can set up multiple kills — to find enemies in busy landscapes, and thankfully that proved useful. Even though many levels let you play as either brother, we ended up sticking with just one of them because we couldn't give the other brother the powerful rifle on which we'd spent our hard-earned virtual dollars. One notable break from the FPS routine is the Western-style duels with bosses — while they're certainly difficult, the badassery you feel when you manage to draw before your opponent totally makes up for it.

And get used to the slightly janky cover system because you'll be using it *a lot*. Rarely did we find it strategically advantageous to move out from behind whatever rock, table, or wall we were hiding behind. The unfortunate result was the feeling that we were simply moving through a series of shooting ranges. But, hey, at least the ranges are pretty.

— Taylor Cocke



THE VERDICT
ON XBOX 360





+ Gorgeous visuals; surprisingly good story.
+ Dueling is totally awesome.
– Unpardonable lack of co-op; cover system is hinky.
? Why include mediocre competitive multiplayer but leave out co-op?

7.0

Fallout 3: Point Lookout

Git 'er done!

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: BETHESDA Developer: BETHESDA ESRB: MATURE
Multiplayer: NONE Selling Points: A huge new add-on for an already-massive game Cost: 800 Microsoft Points ($10)

Shortly after leaving the relative safety of the boat that brought us over to Point Lookout, we ran into mutated über-rednecks that were prowling the swamp. And hoo doggy, did those good ol' almost-human boys ever freak us out. While the end of its main storyline was a bit disappointing, this giant expansion to the world of *Fallout 3* (Point Lookout is about one-fifth the size of the Wasteland) consistently kept up that intensity.

The new main storyline forces you to choose, *Myst*-style, between the loyalty of two rival lunatics who have been battling for centuries. We would have liked a bit more background on their struggle — we were intrigued by the unusual lack of cut-and-dry right and wrong decisions to be made. If Bethesda had spent more time on that rather than creating the other half-dozen less-interesting quests, we could have had a whopper of a DLC on our hands, instead of what proves to be just a pretty good one.

—Taylor Cocke



▶ As *Deliverance* showed us, nothing scarier than a crazy redneck.



▶ Hey! Who wants to play *Luigi's Mansion*?



▶ No, this isn't *Futurama*, but that brain in a jar does prove rather important in your quest.



DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT

+ The swamp is absolutely enormous, fun to explore, and wonderfully creepy.
+ We loved having to choose the lesser of two evils...
– ...but we would have liked to have known more about them first.
? Where are the banjos?

BUY | **FANBOYS ONLY** | DENY

Droplitz

Platform: XBOX LIVE ARCADE Publisher: ATLUS Developer: BLITZ
ESRB: EVERYONE Multiplayer: NONE Cost: 800 Microsoft Points ($10)

Droplitz put us to sleep. We mean that in the best way possible. There's just something very zen about creating a path for little drops of...*something* to get from the droppers to the collectors. Spinning the dials to take advantage of the ever-flowing stream of droplets is accompanied by an increasingly soothing soundtrack that ended up lulling us into a trance. While there are parts of the game that we would have designed differently (why can't you manipulate paths after they've been created?), we were impressed by the way that it never felt too hectic, instead creating an incredibly relaxed feel. But without multiplayer or a huge variety of gameplay, we're not convinced that feeling is worth 10 bucks. — Taylor Cocke

VERDICT 7.0

▶ If you get good at this path-building, you'll rock at *BioShock*'s mini-games.



Burnout Paradise: Big Surf Island

Car chaos, sunny side up

Platform: XBOX 360 Publisher: EA Developer: CRITERION STUDIOS ESRB: EVERYONE 10+ Multiplayer: 8 on Xbox Live
Selling Points: An inexplicable ski jump; clip-on content Cost: 1,000 Microsoft Points ($12.50)

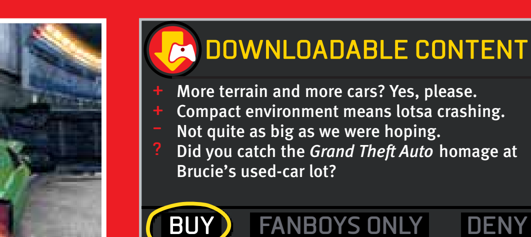
Don't ask why there's an enormous ski jump in the middle of the sandy Big Surf Island — just take your brand-new dune buggy and fling yourself off the top of it. You'll get a good view of this *Burnout Paradise* expansion in the process, with all its off-road pathways, construction sites, and various hidden shortcuts. Since it's a compact area, there's a lot of verticality to the place.

Most races are checkpoint runs, but they can and will spill over into the mainland; this feels like a proper extension to an already content-packed game. You won't unlock most of the nine new cars (including toy versions of the Hollywood-inspired Legendary cars) until you've faced all of *Big Surf*'s specific challenges, so get ready to hunt billboards and smash through fences again. But given all the gameplay extensions you get in this surprisingly compact package, we have no complaints about the $12.50 price.

— Dan Amrich



▶ The lightweight dune buggy handles like nothing else — it's a fantastic death trap!



▶ All your existing cars can cruise the island, too.

DOWNLOADABLE CONTENT

+ More terrain and more cars? Yes, please.
+ Compact environment means lotsa crashing.
– Not quite as big as we were hoping.
? Did you catch the *Grand Theft Auto* homage at Brucie's used-car lot?

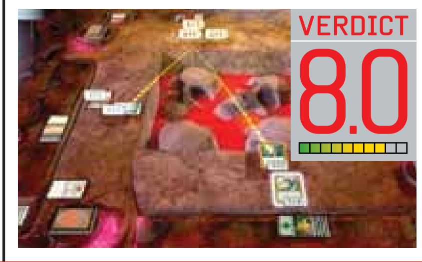
BUY | FANBOYS ONLY | DENY

Magic: The Gathering — Duels of the Planeswalkers

Platform: XBOX LIVE ARCADE Publisher: WIZARDS OF THE COAST Developer: STAINLESS GAMES
ESRB: TEEN Multiplayer: 2 on same screen, 4 on Xbox Live Cost: 800 Microsoft Points ($10)

Magic: The Gathering veterans have long complained about a lack of new players, and those interested in learning the ever-popular collectible-card game are often scared off by its daunting complexity (and cost). *Duels of the Planeswalkers* sets out to solve those problems on two fronts. For beginning players, the tutorial is one of the best we've seen in any medium, short of an actual human teaching you how to play. After finishing that, players are set against a campaign of surprisingly smart A.I. opponents and "win in one turn" challenges, where they can unlock cards to flesh out their premade decks. And with the wonderful Xbox Live multiplayer, veterans will never lack a scrub to smash.

— Taylor Cocke



VERDICT 8.0

THE OLD DAYS: *Bound in Blood* takes place several years before the events of the first *Call of Juarez*, and Ray's former sinful ways definitely make their way to the forefront.

KEEPIN' IT REAL: Just like the rest of *Fallout 3*'s locations, Point Lookout actually exists. This state park in Maryland has a lighthouse, but it doesn't look quite like the one in the game.

Revisit some of the notable hits and misses from the Xbox 360 library as we press...

THE BACK BUTTON

Overlord II



It's not terribly often that we get to play the villain in a game. Sure, some games let us take a more nefarious approach to our inevitable glorious victory, but *Overlord II* is one of the rare few that glorifies evil for the sake of evil. Flaws like the repetitive nature of some of the missions, the absence of a save-anywhere feature, and random mission failures are pretty balanced out by the id-appeasing joy of pillaging the nearest village and using its citizens' lifeforce to fill out your little multi-colored army — making this game the recipient of an 8.0.

Red Faction: Guerrilla



If there's anything that we've wanted to do in most sandbox games, it's blow up that pesky building that happened to get in our way. *Red Faction: Guerrilla* manages to get that little gameplay mechanic down pat. Unfortunately, that's about all it manages to conjure up. The story is fairly lackluster, the towns are a bit too similar, and we didn't particularly care for the protagonist or his companions. But in the end, the explosions and freedom were more than good enough to earn a 7.0.



NATAL IMPRESSED ME MORE THAN I THOUGHT IT WOULD.

Motion controllers make me feel vaguely silly, and even the great Wii games haven't grabbed me too hard. I'm not trying to sound all hardcore — I don't look down on that kind of gaming; it's just not my thing. But it's worth establishing where I'm coming from before I start raving about how Natal bowled me over at E3. Besides, the key part of that tech isn't the motion-controller aspect — it's the level of detail and fidelity in the camera's recognition of your gestures and facial expressions. Natal appears (at least in the E3 demos) to be granular enough to pick up minute hand gestures, recognize individual faces, and even detect changes in expressions. Giving that power to developers should start a whole new ballgame.

Most of what was shown about Natal counts as the *Pong* for that technology. Rudimentary swat-the-ball games like *Ricochet* or the splash-paint-everywhere *Paint Party* are the kind of obvious start-at-the-beginning stuff that we'll all try once, maybe twice, and then never again. But two of Natal's tricks really fired my imagination and anticipation. First, remember the video of the couple sitting on the couch, controlling Netflix by waving a hand to flip through their queue, and then saying "play movie" to start it up? That was eerily cool — it felt like science fiction come true.

More important, though, is the facial recognition — the way a 360 turned on and loaded your Gamertag by recognizing your face, or the way Peter Molyneux's Milo responded to changes in your voice and expressions. It seemed so magical (in the way that sufficiently advanced tech can), and it hinted at a huge potential for changing what it means to interact with a game. At least, I hope it does! I'm picturing the day when a really creative developer achieves the equivalent of a *Half-Life* for Natal — something that resets what we expect from and enjoy about games. How sweet will that be?

— Paul Curthoys

What's the Score?

BlazBlue: Calamity Trigger	August 2009	Xbox 360	8.0
Bionic Commando	July 2009	Xbox 360	8.0
Stormrise	June 2009	Xbox 360	6.0
Boggle	June 2009	XBLA	7.0

The Review Roundup Is On Our Disc!



Back when Xbox was just a strapping young lad, we could fit our review roundup in the magazine. These days, there's just no way. No way at all. So each month we update it, digitize it, and put it on our demo disc. Look for it — complete with the score and issue date of every game we've reviewed — in the Extra Content section.

MONEY MATTERS: After our April 2009 issue was printed, *CellFactor: Psychokinetic Wars'* price was changed from $15 to $10. Doesn't alter our score of 6.5, though.

THE ^UNAUTHORIZED HISTORY OF OXM

From zero to 100 in just eight years! Not surprisingly, *OXM*'s favorite memories are of days spent killing each other. By Ryan McCaffrey



▶ We're not kidding — our old digs really did look like *Halo 2*'s Foundation map!

▶ *OXM* 1.0, from left: Dave Rees, Juliann Brown, Francesca Reyes, Sarah Ellerman, Frank O'Connor, Mike Salmon, Dan Egger, and Mike Wilmoth.

▶ The issue you never saw! A few months before *OXM* launched, we created a sample issue to show the industry. They loved it, and this one-off is hard to find now.

▶ Oh, Chief...we feel like we've known you since you were just John.

Sooner or later everybody asks themselves the same question: How did we get here? After 100 issues of *Official Xbox Magazine*, we asked the same thing. The games may change (or at least get progressively larger numbers tacked onto the end of them), but the spirit remains the same as it was the day the magazine was born.

The actual birth of the magazine involved a lot of boring contracts and stuff, but Future US president Jonathan Simpson-Bint remembers one of the most important moments. "Before the Xbox officially debuted at E3," he recalls, "We were in a bar with a bunch of the [Microsoft] hardware dev team drinking, and I asked one of them how heavy the box was going to be. He very calmly said, 'Well, you tell me.' And he pulled a finished piece of hardware from his backpack under the table and placed it in my hands! The whole table and much of the bar were reduced to utter silence. I think I said, 'Oh, sh*t...'"

Former editorial director Matt Firme remembers a slightly more...*extreme* version of our first encounter with Microsoft: "I could see spider-legged mechs out in the street tearing into the ground, ripping up phone and cable lines, crushing cars, and hammering down utility poles. A lady across the street ran out her door shouting and was immediately gunned down into a pink mist. Soldiers grabbed me and threw me onto my couch, and a cigar-chomping guy in a government-issue black suit came in, glancing around my house as though he disliked my

TRUE STORY?: Our *Halo* names back in the day were: Mr. Death (Mike), Frankie (Frank), Jackson (Dave), Pariah (Ryan), Chuunana (Fran), and Gee (Juliann).



Office *Halo* matches weren't this brutal…but we did think you might like to see one of Nate Van Dyke's awesome illustrations that was considered too graphic to run at the time.

furniture. Finally he ordered his thugs to stand me up, and he stabbed a pen at me. 'Microsoft Legal,' he snarled. 'Sign this NDA.'"

The day-to-day happenings in the early months of *OXM* weren't quite so dramatic once we started cranking out issues. "I don't really remember if I ever turned in any publishable copy during my tenure," muses original features editor Dan Egger. "Thankfully, I didn't need to. Everyone was so talented I just had to look busy. That process consisted mostly of retyping spam emails until the day my 'R' key broke, which forced me to switch to writing my autobiography of Barbara Walters. I also played *a lot* of *Halo*.

"To be fair, *Halo* is probably why I was fired, or it perhaps was the out-of-date Barbara Walters jokes, or maybe I quit…It was a long time ago. But man, it was great while it lasted."

Our old stomping grounds — a two-story office complex in Brisbane, California, that uncannily resembled the *Halo 2* map Foundation — was a grungy, frat-house mess, complete with stained worn-out carpeting, beat-up furniture, and dust bunnies the size of chihuahuas. But, being the red-headed stepchildren we were, we weren't even afforded *those* luxuries. Instead, we were excommunicated to a separate cave on the bottom floor of the building, where we were free to do our "work."

Such as? Well, those Pyramid of Destructions videos on the demo disc didn't make themselves. "Every month, we painstakingly stacked Master Chiefs into a pyramid and fired rockets at its base," remembers former disc producer Dave Rees. "The result was a hilarious ragdoll shower of Chiefs. It was very tedious, but the results were spectacular."

Free from the watchful "why are we paying you?" eyes of our bosses, we had just enough time to put out a magazine each month and get back to what we really wanted to do: play *Halo*. Every day at 5pm — and often earlier on Fridays — Marty O'Donnell's haunting call to battle would wash throughout the office. And the routine rarely changed: We played Capture the Flag on Blood Gulch with all vehicles turned on. We had a standing gentlemen's agreement (routinely violated) that nobody would block the teleporters with the Warthogs or Ghosts. But nobody ever said anything about cheating.

Former executive editor Frank O'Connor explains the crew's early frustrations: "When we were playing LAN games, we'd all rush for power weapons," he begins. "Snipers, rocket launchers, and so on. But for weeks, Dave Rees was absolutely *destroying* us, no matter what we'd do. And he refused to say how. We'd see him, a speck in the distance, and then 'pop-pop-pop,' we're dead. He could shoot us out of tanks, off of ridges, long distance, it didn't matter. 'How are you doing it Dave? We know you're cheating, just explain *how*.'

"He wouldn't 'fess up. Eventually we discovered that the pistol was a three-shot death machine that could destroy anyone from anywhere on the map, but by that time, Dave had finished his transgender surgery and from then on wished to be called Davina. He stopped playing *Halo* and now exclusively plays *Peggle* and *Wii Fit*. If I recall correctly."

The early days of the *Official Xbox Magazine* were full of blown deadlines, a carefree attitude, and a whole hell of a lot of *Halo*. We were a microcosm of the bigger Xbox picture — as obsessed with *Halo* as the fans we served. We all lived in the Ring World; for us, there was *Halo*, and then there was Everything Else.

Fortunately, these days the Everything Else is even better than it used to be, and we're all still here, meeting every month in these pages to talk about it.

So how did we get here? We turned left at Blood Gulch and kept on going.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Match the former *OXM* staffer to their post-*OXM* résumé*

PERSON:	ACCOMPLISHMENT:
[1] Dan Egger	[A] Creator of Mister Chief
[2] Sarah Ellerman	[B] Videogame consultant
[3] Holden Hume	[C] Wanted for murder in at least six states
[4] Frank O'Connor	[D] Editor at Xbox website TeamXbox.com
[5] Tom Price	[E] Packaging artist at a game publisher
[6] Mike Salmon	[F] Cracked the whip (umm…) at an adult-toy catalog
[7] Rob Smith	[G] Turncoat (i.e., works at a different console's official magazine)
[8] Gary Cribb	[H] Left for dotcom glory and riches
[9] Dave Rees	

THE REFLECTING POOL

OUR ORIGINAL EIC CRAFTS A POEM TO COMMEMORATE *OXM*'S 100TH ISSUE

Rememories
By Mike Salmon

I remember XSN Sports and deadline-fueled banana-smashing rage;
What about bottom fillers, and when we shipped that first page?
I recall daily 5pm *Halo* matches with an estimated start time of 3:30,
And constant attempts to make Dan Egger say something dirty.

There were always beers in the mini-fridge and Friday's at The Ramp;
I honestly don't remember what happened that one time at Magazine Camp.
We learned that crushed jalapeños make a great sandwich spread,
And we actually believed all the things that Seamus said.

In retrospect the Duke really was too frickin' large,
And it's obvious now that *OXM* is much better off with a woman in charge.
We awarded two covers to *StarCraft Ghost*?
But it's the peeps, in fact, that I miss the most.

THIS WAS LIVING: The lone HDTV in the office back in the founding days of *OXM* was a 36-inch, 4:3 aspect ratio 480p CRT we used as our demo station for when publishers would visit to show us new games. Whoever got there first for 5pm *Halo* would often be forced to play split-screen with somebody else due to the added size and resolution the set offered.

***ANSWERS:** 1-C, 2-F, 3-E, 4-A, 5-D, 6-B, 7-G, 8-H, 9-G. And Dan Egger isn't wanted for murder in six states. It's actually only two…and Puerto Rico. And Mike Wilmoth, if you're out there, call us!

Inbox

Games-industry news is boring, so we dressed it up in silly outfits and made fun of it for you. You're welcome.



"What do you mean, we have to take a 30-second elevator ride before we can enter the tavern?"

LAUNCHING A pen-and-paper primer for their upcoming ***Dragon Age: Origins*** videogame is Canadian developer **BioWare.** Given their experience playing with the 20-sided dice — the *Dungeons & Dragons* rule set is built into nearly all of their pre-*Mass Effect* games, after all — and the fact that everything BioWare makes lately seems to turn to gold, we'd have to imagine that this **tabletop RPG** will be plenty of fun. And you'll even have time to get drinks and take restroom breaks during the Dungeon Master's **mandatory elevator rides**!

CRYSTAL BALL

The Ball sees Microsoft dropping the price of the 360 only if Sony or Nintendo does so first. Otherwise, expect a game bundle this holiday...Will *Halo: Reach* feature a class-based, *Battlefront*-style multiplayer mode? The Ball seems to think that might be the case...If LucasArts makes a profit on the just-released *Monkey Island: Special Edition*, expect a lot of their back catalog to open up and get the same treatment, starting with *Monkey Island 2*.

ILLUSTRATION BY A.K.A

FOUNDING His own **EXPLOSIVE** development studio is renowned Hollywood producer Jerry "Welcome to The Rock" Bruckheimer. **BOOM!** Appropriately dubbed Jerry Bruckheimer Games Studio (**KABLOOEY!**), the company has hired former Microsoft executive Jim "My Last Name Exceeds the Quota for the Letters 'V' and 'E'" Veevaert to run the operation. We're hoping for the best, but if Bruckheimer ever decides to collaborate with Michael Bay, the whole world could go up in **a giant ball of fire.**

ADDICTED To ***Fallout 3*** is *Friends* alum and totally non-bankable film actor **Matthew "Chandler Bing" Perry.** "I play a lot of videogames, a lot of Xbox 360," he said recently on TV's *The View*. "I played *Fallout 3* so often I had to go to a hand doctor. **I used my hand too much** and had to get injections in it." We're not sure what we should feel sadder about in this case: that Perry spends so much time with a controller in his hands but still evidently doesn't know how to hold it properly, or that he plays so damn much because he doesn't have many acting jobs lined up. *Tssss, burn!*



Chandler, is that you?

ACCEPTING Reservations — a.k.a. **pre-orders** — for upcoming games is big-box retailer **Target**. The "upscale discount" superstore, affectionately pronounced **"Tar-zhay"** by all the women in our lives, is the latest non-videogame store to seek a bigger piece of the console market. Big Red may be smarter than the competition, though, as their hook is to offer their customers a **five-dollar Target gift card** when they come in to actually purchase the game they've reserved. At the program's first sign of success, we expect **GameStop** to instantly go into copycat mode.

PREDICTING A **10-year lifespan** for the Xbox 360 is Microsoft corporate veep **Shane Kim**. Speaking to tech website *VentureBeat*, he said Microsoft's plans include supporting the **current console through 2015**, which would give it a PS2-esque level of longevity. Wow, a decade, huh? We can't even imagine how many Red Rings of Death we'll have racked up by then. (**Jasper**, prove us wrong! Please!)

Shane Kim says the 360 will be supported until 2015...by which time SkyNet will be self-aware and will have declared war on us all.

BIDDING For the comatose (but still breathing) body of **Midway** is emerging games-industry power publisher **Warner Bros.** The latter is offering $33 million for the rights to harvest the usable organs (read: ***Mortal Kombat***) from the terminally ill patient. The bid must be approved by a bankruptcy court, but if it were greenlit, Warner would net Midway's Chicago and Seattle studios, but not their San Diego or UK outlets, nor would they get the ***TNA Wrestling*** franchise. Just think: ***Mortal Kombat vs. Looney Tunes***. "WILE E. COYOTE WINS. ACME-ALITY!"

ORDERIN' THE COURTS

WHINING About the imminent release of *Brütal Legend* is original publisher Activision, who inherited (and subsequently dumped) the rights to the title after merging with Vivendi. Now, the ex is calling to keep Tim Schafer and Co. from hooking up with their new partner (EA), suing for the $15 million it claims it invested in the game. (Activision says it should get the money back because, according to the company, it still holds the rights to release the game.) And now we don't even have to write a joke, because Tim Schafer had his own hilarious response: "Hey, if Activision liked it, then they should have put a ring on it," he told *Kotaku*. "Oh great, now Beyoncé is going to sue me, too."



Rocktober must go on, Activision. Sorry.

BICKERING Over the turntable peripheral-based titles are Activision and Scratch DJ Game, publishers of *DJ Hero* and *Scratch: The Ultimate DJ*, respectively. After Activision purchased *Scratch*-maker 7 Studios, Scratch (the company) sued to block continued work on the game, and a judge ordered 7 Studios to return the source code to Scratch so it could finish the game. Confused? So are we. It's best to just not think about it, actually, lest your head explode. Unless you're a lawyer who charges $250/hour.

COLLIDED In court did Activision (there's that name again!) and Valve over alleged unpaid royalties by the former. The *Half-Life/Team Fortress/Portal/Left 4 Dead* developer went through an ugly divorce from Sierra (which merged with Activision) when it launched its online distribution service, Steam. Now Valve is claiming they are owed over $400,000 per an earlier settlement agreed upon after the two companies parted ways. Hmm, the industry's new mega-publisher versus Valve, a company with a devoted and worshipping fanbase? We wonder whose side the public will take...



"We won't eat your brains if you give us $424,000..."

TAKEN To court over alleged unfair use of names and likenesses in its *NCAA Football* franchise was EA. A class-action lawsuit filed by former Arizona State and Nebraska quarterback Samuel Keller makes the case that "with rare exception, virtually every real-life Division I football or basketball player in the NCAA has a corresponding player in Electronic Arts' games with the same jersey number, and virtually identical height, weight, build and home state." Even if he wins the case, we thought college athletes weren't allowed to be paid in any way. So how would the compensation work? We're so confused!

PRESS RELEASE OF THE MONTH

SO "WE MUST LAUGH TO NUMB THE PAIN OF REALITY" THAT WE COULDN'T HAVE MADE IT UP

New York, NY — MTV's 24-hour college network and the Peter G. Peterson Foundation today unveiled "Debt Ski," an online flash-video game that spotlights the dangers of excessive debt, challenges young people to avoid destructive financial behavior, and spurs fiscally responsible action. Embeddable and designed to spread virally, "Debt Ski" leverages the power of online gaming to reach young people everywhere online — from social networks to blogs. "Debt Ski" is part of the "Indebted" campaign, an ongoing effort by mtvU and the Peterson Foundation to encourage students to help stop the fiscal crisis in the United States.

"Debt Ski" is a side-scrolling videogame where players must maneuver the game's central character, Piggy Banks, through a series of obstacles to maximize his savings, limit his debt, and maintain his level of happiness — all while making payments for necessities like housing and food. Reflecting the choices young people face every day, Piggy Banks has the option to purchase discretionary items like electronics and clothing, which can boost his happiness but also plunge him deep into debt if not purchased in moderation. Spending tsunamis are the biggest threat to Piggy Banks' future, as they represent unexpected life events — such as health expenses or cost-of-living increases — and have the potential to significantly dent savings and/or increase debt.

SO AWESOME WE MUST MENTION IT: Those of you with Nintendo DS handhelds should keep an eye out for a fascinating new game called *Scribblenauts*, in which you solve puzzles by typing in words to spawn in any object you can think of. It's due this holiday; YouTube its hotness if you are not yet a believer.

IT'S OFFICIALLY OVER: There will be no *Madden NFL* for the original Xbox this year...and that was the console's last active series. Our moment of silence was interrupted by a ref's whistle.

NEW GAME IDEA: Given all of the time they're spending in the courtroom these days, maybe Activision could start a new spin-off franchise: *Lawyer Hero*!

THE PAGE OF FREE STUFF

WIN

A 100TH ISSUE PRIZE PACK!

This whole 100th issue thing got us thinking about all the cool stuff we've seen over the years. How can we, *Official Xbox Magazine*, share that coolness with you, the reader? We know, we know — free stuff, and lots of it!

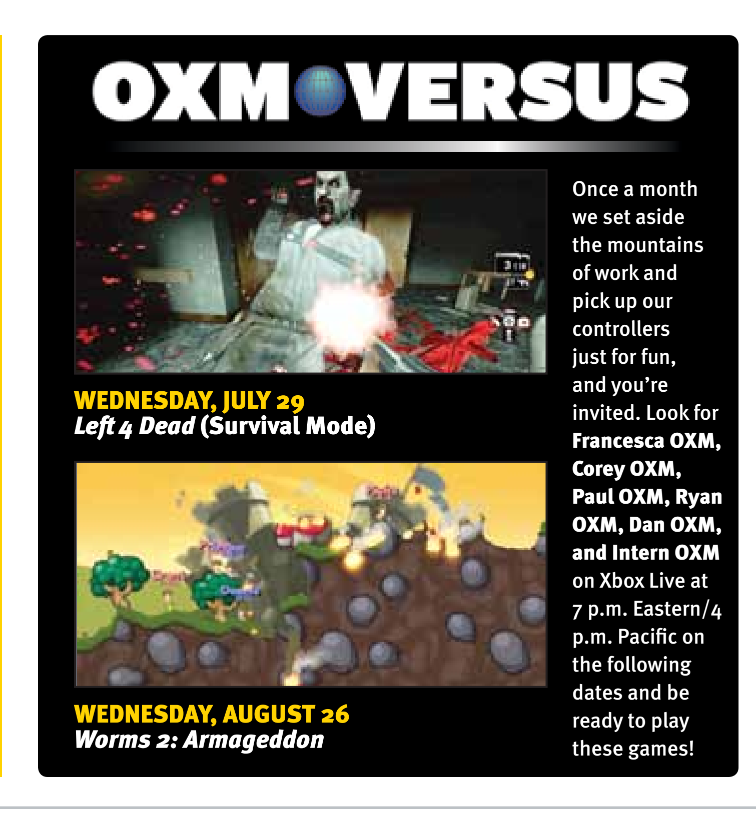
We tracked down some one-size-fits-all stuff related to a few of our favorite things from the recent past, and we've put it into 100 prize packs for you to win. For instance...

- Talented fan Jason Mishler made awesome Xbox Live dogtags, which we profiled in issue 82 — and he sent us 100 of those to give to you, as well as 100 of his original Xbox Live keychain design. He may have cut the metal with a laser, but we still consider them handmade!
- We liked *Guitar Hero: Metallica*, especially Ryan and Corey. So in honor of its high marks in issue 97, we've got 100 *GH Metallica* terrycloth wristbands, courtesy of our pals at Activision.
- Dan and Corey can't say no to a refreshing bottle of Bawls, so the makers of their favorite energy drink have given us 100 glasses — some in original blue, some in G33k B33r brown. Since it's a mix, we'll choose the color for you, but they've all got the distinctive Bawls bumps!
- We gave *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* a 10 back in issue 77, and since the sequel's on its way, Activision hooked us up with 100 *Modern Warfare 2* pens. They light up with a keen green nightvision glow!
- Everybody loves Halo, so Tor Books was kind enough to hook us up with 100 copies of *Halo: Contact Harvest*, the best-selling novel by Bungie's own Joseph Staten. We ran an excerpt of that in issue 76, and now you can find out what happens next!
- Every few months we make a special issue of *OXM* that you can only find on newsstands. We've just wrapped up a new one, *Big Book of Xbox 360 Secrets*, and we've put aside 100 of those to send out to our winners.

To win a prize pack with one of everything listed above, send your name, address, phone number, and email address to **contests@officialxboxmagazine.com** with the subject line "100th Prize Pack." We'll select winners at random after September 25, 2009, and then our intern's hand will cramp as he addresses all 100 packages. But don't worry — his sacrifice is worth it so we can say thanks for your support for the past 100 issues. Good luck from all our generous friends above and from *OXM*!

The Centennial Legal Information

No purchase is necessary to win and as a contestant you have not yet won. One entry per person; multiple entries will be discarded. Entries must be received no later than September 24, 2009. The winners will be chosen on or about September 25, 2009, and will be notified by email (or regular mail). The odds of winning depend upon the number of entries received. The sponsor of the contest is Future US, Inc. ("Future US"), 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Future US cannot be responsible for lost, late, misdirected, or incomplete entries. The prizes are one hundred (100) prize packs, each containing one of the following items: one Modern Warfare 2 pen, valued at $5; one copy of of the paperback novel Halo: Contact Harvest, valued at $14.95; one copy of the OXM special issue Big Book of Xbox 360 Secrets, valued at $9.95; one Bawls glass, valued at $10; one Xbox Live dogtag-style keychain, valued at $5; one Xbox Live "Mishler logo" keychain, valued at $5; and one Guitar Hero: Metallica wristband, valued at $5. The prizes are nontransferable and no substitutions will be allowed. Winners will be determined by a single random drawing of all valid entries and the decision of Future US shall be final. You may obtain the names of the winners by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the address above. This contest is open to residents of the United States only. Entrants must be at least 16 years of age. If a winner is a minor, the prize will be awarded in the name of the winner's parent or legal guardian, who is solely responsible for all applicable federal, state and local taxes. If a winner is a minor, that winner must also provide a signed parental or guardian consent form, provided by the sponsor, within seven days of notification attempt. Failure of the minor to return the guardian consent form will result in forfeiture of the prize and the selection of an alternate winner, who will be chosen through a random drawing from the remaining eligible entries. Return of any prize or prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. The winners may be required to sign an affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance within seven days of receipt; failure to do so upon request will result in forfeiture of the prize. By acceptance of the prize, the winners agree to the use of their name and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. Future US is not responsible for any damages or expenses that winners might incur as a result of this contest or the receipt of any prize. Winners are responsible for paying any income taxes on the value of the prize received. Void in Vermont, Rhode Island, Puerto Rico and where prohibited by law.



OXM VERSUS

Once a month we set aside the mountains of work and pick up our controllers just for fun, and you're invited. Look for **Francesca OXM, Corey OXM, Paul OXM, Ryan OXM, Dan OXM, and Intern OXM** on Xbox Live at 7 p.m. Eastern/4 p.m. Pacific on the following dates and be ready to play these games!

WEDNESDAY, JULY 29
***Left 4 Dead* (Survival Mode)**

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26
Worms 2: Armageddon

COOL PRIZES: Some of the stuff we've given away makes us wish we were eligible to win, too. We had a huge response the time we gave away autographed copies of *Mass Effect*, and while it took a while to get them, the customized *Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway* consoles — one painted, one autographed — were also major lust objects.

LiveSpace

Xbox Live is full of nice people looking for a good game — folks with manners who are good sports and want to meet more people like themselves. That's where LiveSpace comes in. To count yourself among their ranks, send an email to *letters@officialxboxmagazine.com* with the subject line "LiveSpace," and include the following information:

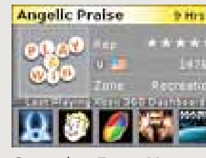
GAMERTAG: YOURS, OF COURSE
▶ Achievements: Which *specific* Achievements do you take the most pride in having earned? What made them special?
▶ Wants to Play: What games do you currently own that you'd like to play with other people on Xbox Live?
▶ Hi, My Name Is: Your first name, where you're from, and your hobbies — gaming-related and otherwise. Basically, tell us more about the gamer behind the tag.

BUCKNUTT317



▶ Achievements: I'm very proud to have "Metallica" (complete career on Expert) and "Hero of the Day" (complete a song on Expert+ drums) in *Guitar Hero: Metallica*. I did the latter with just one kick pedal!
▶ Wants to Play: *Grand Theft Auto IV*, any *Guitar Hero*, and any *Rock Band*
▶ Hi, My Name Is: Matthew, from Burlington, New Jersey. I'm a junior in high school and I love metal music, including death and thrash metal.

ANGELIC PRAISE



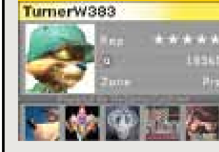
▶ Achievements: *Bully*'s "Over the Rainbow" (receive 20 kisses from the gents) was a riot. *The Simpsons*' "Press START to Play" is another favorite; c'mon, who *didn't* get it?
▶ Wants to Play: *Uno*, *Carcassonne*, *Sacred 2*, *Forza Motorsport 2*, *Team Fortress 2*, and *1 vs. 100*
▶ Hi, My Name Is: Charles, from Providence, Rhode Island. I'm an author, a volunteer, and a community activist for people with disabilities. And an RPG fanatic eager for a good 360 MMO!

ROGUE21121



▶ Achievements: Right now, my finest is "Blood Donor" (defeated Scarlet) from *Silent Hill: Homecoming*. My friend and I took turns playing for about two hours!
▶ Wants to Play: *Rock Band*, any *Guitar Hero*, *Resident Evil 5*, and *Gears of War 2*
▶ Hi, My Name Is: Jen, from Kamloops, British Columbia, Canada. When I'm not gaming, I'm usually reading some useless, trivial, nerdy stuff. Add me if you want to chat.

TURNERW383



▶ Achievements: I enjoyed wasting a weekend getting the "5-Day Survivor" and "7-Day Survivor" Achievements for *Dead Rising*. I like my "Golden Bird Award" (find all birds in *Condemned*), too.
▶ Wants to Play: *The Darkness*, *Saints Row 2* co-op, *Call of Duty 3* (ranked matches), *Perfect Dark Zero*, *Kane & Lynch*, *Two Worlds*, *The Outfit*, and *Turok*
▶ Hi, My Name Is: Turner, from Iowa. I love to play detailed RPGs. I work on cars with my dad; my current project is my '31 Ford Coupe.

MEDIA HO

THE XBOX 360 UNCLOAKED
BY DEAN TAKAHASHI / SPIDERWORKS / $23 STREET

OPENING THE XBOX
BY DEAN TAKAHASHI / PRIMA / $10 USED

Microsoft isn't known for sharing its secrets — but somehow, tech journalist Dean Takahashi learns them anyway. The highly unauthorized, extremely enlightening origin stories in *Opening the Xbox* reveal plenty of internal politics, business shenanigans, and roads not taken (yes, a portable system was considered). *The Xbox 360 Uncloaked* offers further insights on the creation of *Gears of War*, the Bill Gates–endorsed evolution of Xbox Live Arcade, and the Zero Hour launch event.

While *Opening* is a pretty smooth read, the clunkier *Uncloaked* awkwardly repeats itself. But both out-of-print books are still recommended for anyone who wants to dig into some real Xbox dirt — the kind Microsoft simply ain't gonna tell you.

— Dan Amrich

2,000 PENNIES OR LESS

KILLER BARGAINS FOR THE CHEAPSKATE GAMER

MICROSOFT XBOX
$20 used

Think you have to pay a lot for obsolete hardware? Think again! This summer, the original Xbox is emerging from dusty closets to claim its rightful place at flea markets and yard sales across the country. Most stores want $50 or so, but a recent eBay search turned up some interesting deals for much less — like an Xbox with *Fable* for only $10 with just four hours to go and no bids! Lots of naked consoles — still perfectly capable of playing a library of more than 700 games — sported starting bids of around $15 (though shipping took them over the $20 barrier, so caveat emptor). And if you're the tinkering type, you'll find lots of broken and "for parts" consoles in need of your screwdriver and some TLC, usually starting at 99 cents. Hell, for that price, hollow out the case, add a hinge to it, and use it to store all your 360 controllers and accessories. (Please note that if you actually do this, you will make Seamus Blackley cry.)

— Dan Amrich



STRIKING BACK: We've already got something cool to give away next issue. It has to do with an upcoming game, but it's not the game itself. It'll all make sense next month.

TWO-UP: *Prototype*'s "Trail of Corpses" Achievement (kill 53,596 Infected) tops similar Achievements in *Left 4 Dead* (kill 53,595 Infected) and *Dead Rising* (defeat 53,594 zombies).





Mike Salmon was the original editor-in-chief of *OXM* and still spends his days and nights playing games with a controller. He now works with developers and publishers to help make better games as a founding member of The Big Solutions Group.

THE FUTURE OF XBOX

YOU CAN HAVE MY CONTROLLER WHEN YOU PRY IT FROM MY COLD, DEAD HANDS!

Bring on the motion controls — as long as they don't screw everything up.

By Mike Salmon

If you attended E3 this year or just read the write-ups about the show, you'd think that the traditional videogame controller was about to go the way of the dodo. I don't know about all of you, but I'm not ready to drop my good buddy the control pad anytime soon. I move better with two analog sticks than I do with one gimpy knee. With my control pad, I can shoot conveniently marked explosive barrels with impeccable accuracy at unreal distances; but with my arms, I can't even shoot that stupid clown mouth at the fair from six feet away. I enjoy using a control pad for gaming and I think that most of you do, too.

The technology for Project Natal is undoubtedly cool, but I'm not shooting the Covenant with an "air gun" and I'm sure as hell not busting out a Stevie Ray Vaughn guitar solo without my plastic Strat. That said, I am looking forward to Project Natal and even that silly PlayStation 3 Magic Wand thing. But I don't want every 360 and PS3 game to suddenly have motion controls. Use the technology to do something different — something that can't be done on a control pad and something aimed directly at the mass market/non-gamer these motion controllers attract. Let's all learn a lesson from the Wii and not try to force-feed motion control to the genres we are all used to. What's worked best on the Wii has been gameplay that simply couldn't be done with a regular controller — things like *Wii Fit* and *Wii Sports*. But most of the other games on Wii make you waggle your hands instead of pressing the B button in traditional third-person action games based on movies. Does that count as innovation just because it's different? Does it count as...better?

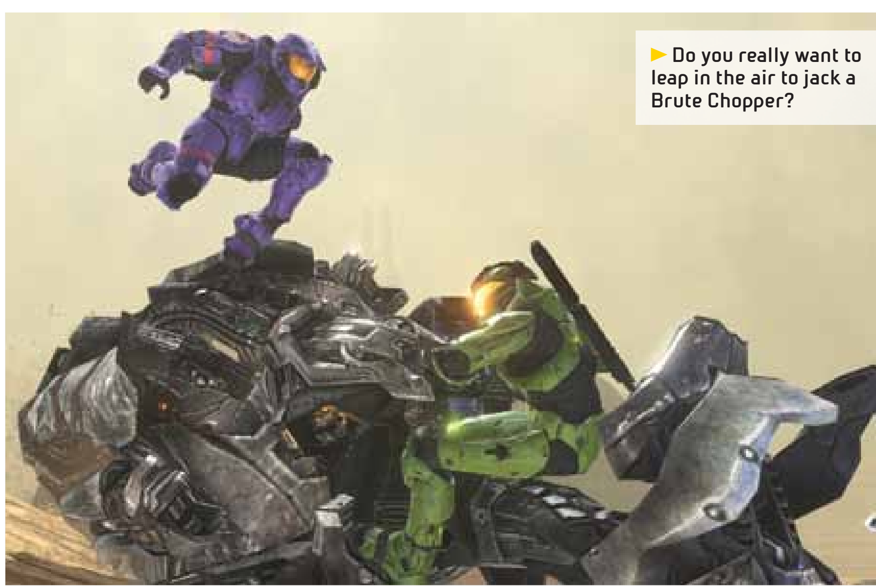
The games that will make Project Natal (and the others) a success aren't going to come from any franchise or genre we're even aware of right now. And the developers and publishers who quickly recognize this will be the ones to not only drive this technology home to the mass market, but also sell a bunch of games in the process.

So go ahead and give me motion-control games for the 360. I may be an old and grumpy ex-editor, but I understand motion-based control is the way forward — and the way to bring more people into gaming. Just please, don't force me (or any other hardcore gamer) to put down my controller whenever it's clearly the best tool for the job. I'm sure there are mimes the world over celebrating the chance to use their skillz in gaming, but the rest of us still love our 360 control pad and would much rather use the left bumper than pretend to throw a grenade.

> PROJECT NATAL IS COOL, BUT I'M NOT SHOOTING THE COVENANT WITH AN "AIR GUN"



Motion controls are beautiful...but only when the game matches the concept.



Do you really want to leap in the air to jack a Brute Chopper?

ONE FINAL NOTE: In case it hasn't been said, thank you for your support, enthusiasm, and feedback over the last 100 issues! In every way possible, you are the reason we're here.